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model for THE TOFF

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Model for the Toff

John Creasey

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CONTENTS

		page
1.	THE DESIGNER	7
2.	THE TOFF AT SPEED	15
3.	CAUSES FOR FEAR	25
4.	ZANA REMEMBERS	31
5.	BERYL WARD	41
6.	CLOSE SHAVE	47
7.	MODEL FOR ZANA	56
8.	IDENTIFICATION	63
9.	NEW MODEL	72
10.	STRONG MAN	80
11.	UNLOCKED DOOR	86
12.	CATCH	94
13.	CAUSE FOR SUSPICION	102
14.	HIGGS	111
15.	ROSE MARY BELL	119
16.	BRUTE	127
17.	ROUGH SKETCHES	133
18.	BEAUTY TALKS	141
19.	TINY JOE	149
20.	TRUTH?	157
21.	EMPTY NIGHT	165
22.	QUIET	172
23.	CHANCE	179
24.	LIFE STORY	188

I

THE DESIGNER

"BEAUTIFUL," said the Toff.

"Beautiful," he repeated.

"Beautiful," he sighed, and handed the coloured photograph to Jolly, his man and, if the truth be told, his manager. "No, I won't do it."

"If I may make so bold as to suggest, sir," began Jolly, an elderly and wrinkled sage, "you might be well advised to reconsider the decision, and——"

"No."

Jolly looked down upon the Toff, more sadly than censoriously.

"Is your mind firmly made up, sir?"

"Firmly."

"Very good," said Jolly, and turned the photograph of the girl over on its face, so that all he could see was the white back and the rubber stamped impression, reading: *Copyright of Hugo Zana, London, England.* "The only other matter which requires your immediate attention is that of the Everlasting Cement Company. You will recall that the managing director, Sir Frederick Symes, wrote with a letter of introduction from Lord Lomely, on the matter of the bones, which he believes to be human, found embedded in some experimental cement block made some nine months ago. He is dissatisfied with the progress made by the police, and you promised you would consider the possibility of investigating."

"Did I?"

"Yes, sir."

"Jolly," said the Toff, getting to his feet slowly, only to lean upon his large, beautifully figured walnut desk,

and to turn his back upon the remarkable trophy wall near it, "you should have warned me."

"I did suggest that it might not be in your best interests——"

"I don't mean about Symes and his cement; I mean about me. I am slipping fast. I even consider mixing sentiment with cement for the sake of Lord Lomely. Don't let it happen again if you can help it."

"No, sir. Am I to understand that you do not propose to take up the Everlasting Cement matter either?"

"That is precisely what you are to understand," the Toff confirmed. "Everlasting," he mused. "That's the trouble, I'm afraid. I'm neither everlasting nor evergreen."

"For a man in the early forties, sir——"

"I know. The prime of life. It sounds like a side of beef. Do you know why I have refused to paddle in the Zana oceans of pulchritude?"

"Presumably you do not consider the problem worthy of your talents, sir."

The Toff looked at his wise man thoughtfully, as if wondering whether there was indeed a hint of sarcasm in the rejoinder. Jolly's lined face and fine brown eyes were quite expressionless. He was in his sixties, a man of medium height who stood very short against the Toff, with sparse grey hair and a doleful look, a black coat and striped grey trousers. The contrast with the Honorable Richard Rollison—otherwise known as the Toff—was quite remarkable. Rollison would not believe it, but to the casual passer-by he looked nearer thirty than forty, not only tall, but lean, not only tanned, but quite remarkably handsome; and, largely because of the ministrations of Jolly, he also looked immaculate. Just now he wore a suit of navy blue, a discreet tie, and that pensive gleam in his eye which gave little away.

"No, Jolly," he said at last, "it was nothing to do with my talents, and wholly to do with the temptations

of great beauty. You have passed the age of such allurements," he added, and then demanded almost sharply: "Haven't you?"

"I confess that I don't understand you, sir."

"Let me explain," said Rollison, and stretched out for the photograph. "This is the beautiful Rose Mary Bell, London's most famous and most beautiful model, perhaps the wide world's most famous model, too. She is a beautiful human being. She has not only everything, but, if the judges are to be believed, much more. Her photograph is seen everywhere. She is one of ITA's top ten, yet all she does is allow herself to be photographed. She talks even less than Sabrina. But even if she isn't human, I am."

He paused; while Jolly looked owlish in his puzzlement.

Rollison moved towards that remarkable wall behind him. On it were strange articles, such as sharp knives and toy pistols, masks and a miniature human skull, phials of deadly poisons and such innocuous things as chicken's feathers and silken and nylon stockings. There was even a photograph of a baby, looking as if it was ready to coo.

"This the newspapers call my trophy wall," announced Rollison, as if sorrowfully. "Here are souvenirs of countless packets of trouble, but look behind the macabre and the sinister, Jolly. Take this, for instance." He stretched out his hand and lifted a nylon stocking, fragile as gossamer to look at, and draped it over his forefinger. There were runs in it, and a smear or two of nail varnish. "This is the memento of our last case of any significance. One fifteen denier nylon stocking for one slim and lovely leg. Was I interested in the lady's leg?"

Jolly put his head on one side, rather like a cocker-spaniel wondering what this chatter was all about.

"As a leg, no. As a leg on which the stocking which

had the clue, yes," said Rollison. "I helped to hang the lady, lovely though she was. Even six months ago my interest was in the case, not the face; in the problem, not the lady's figure. Even you wouldn't believe that I was ever completely oblivious of anyone with dimensions of thirty-four, twenty-three, thirty-four, or whatever it ought to be; but whenever the moment came I could always be dispassionate. Do you want to know the sad and sorrowful truth about me at this very moment?"

"That is entirely a matter for you to decide, sir."

"Lie. If you didn't want to hear, you would pretend that you'd left a pie in the oven and vanish like a puff of smoke. The sad and sorrowful truth about me is that I don't trust myself with beauty. It preoccupies me. Taken a step further, it could become an obsession. If I had to choose between trusting my judgment and trusting a lovely, I would probably trust the lovely. I hope it's a phase through which I'll pass quickly, but until it's gone I don't want to be involved with Zana or Rose Mary Bell, or models and dress designers and all that they imply. Have I made myself clear?"

"Very clear indeed, sir," said Jolly, "and you will not mind my saying that I think you are to be congratulated for being so vividly aware of the danger. After all, the phase comes to all of us sooner or later, doesn't it?"

"All?"

"Yes, sir."

"You?"

"About fifteen years ago."

"Good lord!" ejaculated Rollison, and eyed his man as if he had never set eyes on him before. "How long did it last?"

"About fifteen years, sir."

"What?" Rollison said weakly.

"At times it is more obtrusive than at others," went

on Jolly smoothly, "but it has been there practically all the time. The real problem is to learn to control it."

Very slowly Rollison put his head on one side.

"Proceed," he said.

"Well, sir, it is a perfectly natural phenomenon, and is likely to last for a long time, particularly, I understand, with bachelors." Jolly was positively airy. "If I may make so bold, I understand that with the average married man the period of the phenomenon varies according to the individual's marital contentment and general domestic happiness, but in the case of——"

"Bachelors."

"Precisely, sir. In their case, without connubial bliss or strict moral obligation imposed by marriage it becomes a matter with which one has to live permanently. If I may venture to advise, sir——"

"I know what you're going to advise."

"Do you, sir?"

"You are going to say that I should grasp the nettle, take the bull by the horns, strike while the iron is hot, face the facts, accept the inevitable, and in order to discipline and to inure myself to this common or garden phenomenon, agree to look into the case of lovely Rose Mary and ugly Hugo Zana. Because," added Rollison, now shaking a forefinger, "if I were to take this plunge forthwith, I would soon be surrounded by a bevy of beauties, and would become immersed in their lushness, as it were, and be unable to see t'other from which. In actual fact, you are going to suggest that this matter of Zana and Rose Mary Bell could not have come at a more appropriate——"

"Excuse me, sir. Fortuitous."

"Fateful?"

"As you prefer. Shall I telephone Mr. Zana, sir?"

"If the devil has disciples of the smooth and unctuous kind, I think they'll all be like you," said Rollison. "How much have we in the bank?"

"A little under two hundred and five pounds, sir."

"You mean two hundred and four pounds seventeen shillings and ninepence."

"Fifteen shillings and eightpence to be precise, sir."

"And we have to exist for a couple of months before the next substantial dividends come in?"

"Nine weeks, sir."

"All right, how much can you screw Zana up to?" asked Rollison in sorrowful resignation.

"As a matter of fact," said Jolly, "I did not have to make any attempt to increase his offer of a retainer, as it was already one thousand pounds. I thought it wise to accept at once, particularly as Mr. Russell, who first spoke for him, was generous enough to say that if there should be a successful outcome of the investigation, Mr. Zana would remit another thousand pounds."

"You know, Jolly, this job's hurting Zana," said Rollison thoughtfully, "otherwise he wouldn't pay money like that. What's the general outline of the problem—no, don't tell me, I still have a little self respect. Ah, yes. About twelve months ago Zana lost a favourite model. She went to France and was installed as a kind of Paris jewel. A month later he lost two more—one resigned for no apparent reason, and now works for a much smaller agency, the other also went to Paris, and——"

"New York, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir. I understand from Mr. Russell that it was the fourth young lady who went to Paris."

"I see. Altogether, since the first one left him, Zana has lost eleven beauties, a much higher rate of loss than a leading dress designer has any right to expect, and not all of them have gone to better paying jobs. Right?"

"Right, sir."

"Right! Hugo Zana is an independent spirit, being part Czech, part Austrian, part English and part French. He did not propose to implore any model, not even the

best model in the world, to stay with him. Let them go, he said, he could hire plenty more as lovely or even lovelier. And so he did, until two months ago—when the agencies began to say that they could not find him more. Which is absurd."

"So he believes, sir."

"So do I. Nine out of ten of the unknown but hopeful Circes who pose in the semi-nude for the tabloid newspapers hope that Zana or someone like him will see them and put them on his pay roll. The agencies likewise. Now even the agencies won't supply Zana, and he is talking about trying to get his models by direct advertising, but he thinks that will do his name no good at all. Right?"

"You have a complete grasp of the situation," murmured Jolly humbly.

"We'll see," said Rollison, and glanced at a clock on the trophy wall, which was ticking faintly. It was ten minutes to twelve, on a clear, crisp, autumn day. "Throughout his trials and troubles, Zana has had one anchor. If you can call nine stone two pounds, thirty-four, twenty-three, thirty-four an anchor. I mean, dear Rose Mary Bell. The most famous model—but I've already said that. Rose Mary remained loyal throughout, and Rose Mary was enough, at least for Zana's self-respect. Now she has disappeared."

"That is his great concern, sir," Jolly murmured.

"She disappeared two days ago, or so Zana says."

"She went home from his *salon* about half-past five the day before last, and hasn't been seen since," declared Jolly. "She——"

"Zana's bound to tell us this all over again, so skip it," said Rollison. "I don't like him, Jolly; I've only seen him at a distance. Is he as painfully central European as he looks?"

"I can only say, sir, that when he spoke to me he was most precise and businesslike," said Jolly. "Although

his accent was a little difficult to follow at first, his English is excellent. After Mr. Russell had arranged terms, Mr. Zana took over the discussion. He knew exactly what he wanted, and went all out to get it, a tenacity which I felt sure would appeal to you, sir."

"Oh, did you?" said Rollison, and glanced at the photograph of Rose Mary, and then into Jolly's face. The contrast was quite remarkable; it was even difficult to believe that these were of the same species. "Jolly."

"Sir?"

"What time is he coming?"

"At twelve noon, sir."

"My man," said Rollison, coldly, "I have been thinking a great deal about you. In view of your revelation of unbridled passions over the past fifteen years, I consider that it would be unwise for you to become involved in this affair of lush pulchritude. Cement mixing is far more in your line. Sir Frederick Symes is a very wealthy man. How much did you get him up to?"

"Five hundred pounds, sir, for a preliminary investigation."

"The truth about you is that you ought to be behind bars for fraud." said Rollison roundly. "After Zana's gone, telephone Sir Frederick, tell him that I've asked you to make some preliminary inquiries preliminary to my preliminary investigation, and when will it be convenient for you to go and see him?"

"Very good, sir."

"And make one other thing clear," added Rollison severely. "Your preliminary is entirely free of both charge and obligation."

"Yes, sir."

"It is now four minutes to twelve. If Zana is as tenacious as you say he is, he'll be here on the dot. Let him in, leave us alone, but switch on the tape recorder. We might find it useful to study his accent when he's gone."

"At once, sir," said Jolly, and without a change of expression he moved to the trophy wall, on which there were several switches, for the lighting effects at night were quite a sight to see. Concealed among the trophies was a small tape recording unit, and Jolly pressed the switch of this down, then got out whisky, gin, sherry, a syphon of soda and some glasses, and as he finished, the cuckoo clock on the trophy wall cucked clear and sweet, twelve times.

As the twelfth cuck came, there was a ring at the front door.

Rollison grinned. Jolly unbent and smiled as he turned towards the door of the room, which stood ajar. Beyond was a lounge hall, very little used, the door leading to the landing. This was the only flat on this, the fourth floor, and no one came up here except to see the Toff.

Jolly was actually at the door, his hand outstretched for the handle, and Rollison was looking again at the picture of Rose Mary, when a new and startling sound intruded from outside.

There was a cry as of alarm; and a shot.

2

THE TOFF AT SPEED

JOLLY'S fingers seemed to stiffen before they closed about the door handle. That was only for a split second. It was time enough for Rollison to drop the photograph and leap towards the lounge hall, stride across it, and push his man to one side. Standing close to the wall with his arm stretched out, he opened the door and flung it wide.

A man crouched close to the floor.

This man came in, moving almost as fast as Rollison; Rollison only glimpsed his dark, shiny hair, his pale face with a large nose, and his doubled-up figure, clad in pale grey. Rollison could not see whether the caller was hurt, but judged that he was scared.

"Mr. Rollison!" Jolly cried.

"Look after him," Rollison said, quite softly, and shot out of the flat, also bent almost double and still moving fast.

Below were footsteps of someone hurrying; light footsteps, too. Rollison reached the top of a flight of stairs and put a hand on the rail and then bounded down, reached a half landing, and repeated the performance. This was a well-shaped staircase, and by looking over the banisters he could see every flight of stairs below him, although not every part of the landings.

He saw a girl.

There she was, running. She wore a wine-red suit, a small red hat; had dark hair, and very nice legs. She glanced round as if in terror, but that might be Rollison's imagination. She was half-way towards the street level, and Rollison's chances of catching up with her were slim, but that didn't stop him from trying. His own footsteps echoed loudly, but he could distinguish hers quite clearly, and she must know that he was close upon her heels.

She disappeared at one of the landings, but soon appeared again, moving with a grace which was beautiful to see, notwithstanding the skirt rucked up above her knees. She hadn't lost much ground.

Half-way down the next flight of stairs, Rollison put a hand on the banisters and vaulted over. This way he should gain almost a flight, and still win a chance of catching her up before she reached the street. He landed, slipped on a stair, grabbed the banisters again and straightened up; and lost some of the precious seconds he had gained.

He couldn't see the girl.

He couldn't hear her.

Crack! came a shot.

He flattened himself against the wall as chippings from it showered on his face, some of them very sharp. That had been a lot too close for comfort. The footsteps came again, but Rollison had lost nearly all that hard-won time. If the girl had a car waiting outside, or even a bicycle, she would have a good chance to get clear away.

She leapt the last few stairs, and ran along the hall. Rollison, two half-flights above, saw that the front door was open. So he still had a chance, and with luck the girl would run into someone outside who would delay her for the seconds that mattered. He raced down the last flight as the door was slammed, but he felt exultant, close enough now to be sure that he would have a chance.

Then he kicked against string stretched across the stairs, and crashed down helplessly. Instinctively he turned his shoulder to the ground, but in spite of that he bumped his head, and the blow made him feel as well as look quite silly.

* * * *

He stood up slowly, his head ringing and painful. His shoulder hurt, but that didn't greatly trouble him. He glanced down at the stairs, and saw a piece of dark twine, one end tied to the banisters, one to a piece of lead which had moved under the impact; that trip-cord could have been set in a second. The old, old trick, and he had fallen for it. He had seen the girl jump clear, but had taken it for granted that she had jumped out of haste, not to hurdle.

He went to the front door with long but steadier strides, rubbing his head, hearing the sound of a car engine fading. It had started up as he had fallen, and he had little doubt that the girl was in the car.

He hadn't even time to see what model it was.

He opened the door, a little warily, but there were no

more tricks. The bright day greeted him, and a puzzled wire-haired terrier glanced up perkily. A neighbour's dog; and he knew that the neighbour would not be far away. She was about to pass the door, a middle-aged, spindly woman, carrying a leather lead.

"My goodness, Mr. Rollison," she said in high good humour, "you haven't started chasing young girls now, have you?"

"It's been my lifelong practice," said Rollison solemnly, "but this one got away. Which way did she go?"

"I'm not sure that I should tell you." This neighbour was the roguish kind, a spinster who knew exactly how to handle handsome bachelors. Rollison was in no mood for her, but no one else was in the street.

"What make of car was it?" he asked, without much hope.

"I really can't tell one car from another," the neighbour said blithely; "it was rather a small one, dark I think. Wasn't it, Smitty? I call my dog Smitty," she added, and beamed at the Toff. "As a matter of fact, the car went towards Piccadilly, Mr. Rollison, and I must say that I thought it was being driven much too fast, something really ought to be done about reckless drivers."

"I couldn't agree with you more," said Rollison fervently. "How many people were in it, did you notice?"

"As a matter of fact," the neighbour said, "Smitty was pulling, and I only just saw this young woman get into the car."

It would be a waste of time asking her if she had noticed the number, although it might be worth putting Jolly on to her later. Now, Rollison smiled his thanks and said: "Have a nice walk, Smitty," and turned and went back into the house. The neighbour stood staring after him, as if it was dawning on her that he looked dishevelled, which was not usual.

Then he forgot her, for here was Jolly; panting.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Bowed but unbeaten," Rollison said, and smoothed back his hair and straightened his jacket. "How's Zana?"

"Hardly hurt at all, sir," said Jolly. "In fact he says there is little more than a scratch. I insisted that he should stay upstairs, but——"

There were footsteps above their heads, sharp and impatient; and as they looked round Zana came towards them. Unlike Rollison, he was not dishevelled. He was a short man, beautifully dressed in that pale grey, with his large pointed nose and large, urgent eyes and large, loose mouth. Everything about him, including his thin black hair, seemed to shine, and there was an unmistakable hint of perfume about him.

"You must teach me how to insist like that," said Rollison, and moved forward. "Mr. Zana, there's no need——"

"It is my fault entirely," Zana said, as if with anger. He had a hard, low-pitched voice, as if he spoke from the back of his throat and had to force the words out. "I come here, and what happens? You are shot at, your life is endangered. I regret it, Mr. Rollison; I can only offer you my sincerest apologies." He made the word sound like *a-pollogiss*. "You are not badly hurt?"

"Not hurt at all."

"To my very great relief," said Zana. "Now I can well understand if you refuse to help me. I did not expect you to act as—what do you say? Aunt Sally, isn't it?"

"It could be," Rollison agreed gravely.

"Mr. Rollison," declared Zana with great earnestness, "I beg you to believe I am desolated."

"It's better than if we were both badly hurt." Rollison smiled into the eager, ugly face, and put out his hand. "How are you?"

"I—how *am* I?" A bright gleam sprang into Zana's eyes. "I have told you, I am desolated!"

"Let's go upstairs and have a drink," said Rollison. "Jolly, Mrs. Arbuthnot said the sharpshooter went off in a small dark car which turned towards Piccadilly. Go down and see if you can find anyone who noticed any more, will you? There may have been someone at the corner."

"At once, sir."

"Thanks," said Rollison, and motioned Zana towards the stairs. He saw a tear in the smooth texture of the dress designer's sleeve, and had little doubt that it had been caused by a bullet. "How's your arm?"

"It is nothing," said Zana, and waved his arm as if to prove it. "If that were all there was to worry me, I would be so happy. Mr. Rollison, be honest with me, please. This does not make you decide you will not help me?"

"It makes me decide that there's nothing I'd like to do more."

Zana hesitated, as if trying to make sure he knew exactly what that meant, then suddenly he seized Rollison's right hand and gripped it with both of his, with great strength. At the first moment of the grip his fingers almost crushed Rollison's, who was quite unprepared.

"You are a good man, a brave man. I thank you very much!" Zana cried. "It takes much to frighten you, and I am very grateful. So many people are easily frightened." He gave Rollison's hand another powerful squeeze, and let it go. By then they were on the top landing, where the door stood wide open, the mat a little awry where it had been kicked. Rollison glanced at the front door, which was of dark stained oak.

"The mark of the bullet," Zana pointed.

"I'll get that out; it might be useful later," said Rollison. He closed the door and led the way to the

drawing-room-cum-study, seeing Zana's eyes widen at sight of the trophies; but the dress designer made no comment. Rollison picked up a bottle.

"Whisky? Gin?"

"Thank you, no, not in the middle of the day."

"Sherry?"

"Well—a little, thank you."

Rollison poured out a whisky and soda for himself. His head was aching a little and his shoulder was sore, but these were mild and passing nuisances. He studied the little man, who now turned to look with unveiled interest at the trophy wall until he said abruptly:

"To-day you nearly added my scalp, isn't it?"

Rollison grinned. "I only scalp the bad men."

"And how do you know I am not a bad one?" demanded Zana, his eyes glowing. "Is it not possible?"

"Are you?"

"We-ell," said Zana slowly, while he swayed slightly from the waist, as if trying to make up his mind. "*Comme çi, comme ça.* Yes and no. Now I am bad, now I am good, would you expect me to be perfect?" He had the most mobile face and most brilliant, challenging eyes Rollison had seen for a long, long time. "Some say one thing, some say the other. It is the same about you. Before I come to you I ask my friends, and still I have many friends. What do they say? One of them, that you are a brilliant detective, a great man, honest as the day, that even the Scotland Yard detectives respect you and perhaps are a little afraid. And the other? Well, I am honest with you, so you will be honest with me! The other says Rollison is a big mouth, he does very little work, he puts up the big front. Which one do I believe?"

"You take the very question out of my mouth," said Rollison dryly.

"Good! Now I tell you the answer. Neither! You are not so good as the one, not so bad as the other. But—"

Zana's mouth was huge, especially when he spread it in a grin, as now, and he looked like a circus clown. "I have friends, I have one who asks the big shots at Scotland Yard. What do they say? They say that you are good enough for me."

"Thank you."

"To-day you have proved it," said Zana, and waved as if it couldn't matter less. "Now, are you ready to listen?"

"Yes, but first let's go into the bathroom and have a look at that wound."

"What wound? Oh, this is nothing," Zana waved his arm again to prove it, and saw the bright red of blood on his wrist and the back of his hand. He put his head on one side, more clown-like than ever, and looked at Rollison with a quick smile. "Well, perhaps it is a little worse than I thought. We go and see, eh?"

Rollison led him to the bathroom, which was sumptuous in pale green. Zana took this in with one swift glance, and began to take his coat off. Rollison eased it from his shoulders. The shirt beneath was unbelievably white, except at the left sleeve which was stained crimson from the middle of the forearm downwards. Zana held this over a hand-basin as Rollison turned on the taps, then moved to find some antiseptic.

He stopped abruptly.

Zana had pulled up his sleeve so that it was above the elbow. The wound, as a wound, was so covered with blood that it was impossible to see how deep it was, but Rollison did not stop because of that.

It was the sight of Zana's arm which had startled him.

It was very powerful, with the muscles so well developed that any professional strong man might have looked at them with interest, if not envy. But that was not all. Round the elbow, half-way down the forearm, and obviously continuing towards the shoulder, were old scars so deep and twisted that they looked like tiny

writhing snakes. At some time or other Zana must have been mauled almost to pieces.

Rollison brought the antiseptic and poured a little into the hand-basin. Zana had already torn off a piece of cotton-wool and started to dab vigorously, as if impervious to pain.

"How did you begin life?" Rollison inquired mildly. "As a lion tamer?"

"Oh, that," said Zana, and shrugged as he glanced at the scars. "No, when I was young I was an artist. The human body, it has always fascinated me, the strong man, the beautiful woman—even animals. But that wound was caused by something very different from claws. It was caused by barbed wire. Once I was in a concentration camp, and I did not want to remain. So I climbed over the barbed wire. I made friends with the prison dogs, but not the wire! It curled up, all around me. Such a night that was."

"So they took you back," said Rollison.

"Oh, no, they did not catch *me*," Zana said proudly. "I kept very quiet as I tore myself free. That took a little time, and afterwards I stayed many hours in a river. There was no doctor, no first aid such as this, so the wound took much time to heal. This—*this* is nothing."

The wound had gouged out a little flesh, and, provided it was well looked after, would soon heal. Rollison dabbed until the bleeding had almost stopped, then put on a salve, gauze and adhesive plaster. Zana hardly seemed to notice what was being done, and before Rollison had finished burst out:

"Why do we not do three things at the same time? You patch me up, I talk, you listen. Please."

He began to tell the story which Rollison had already heard from Jolly, and it did not surprise him that it varied in no single detail. When it was finished, Zana had his jacket on again, and was waving his injured arm about as if the wound was completely forgotten.

"So I ask myself what is it happening," he went on. "At first I think of my rivals, it is a cut-throat business, you understand, we smile and bow at each other, but we will steal each other's models like one o'clock. We will do anything and everything in this business, Mr. Rollison, except one thing. Understand that, please. Models, work-room girls, designers, artists, all those things we steal from one another, but the actual creations —no. There is an honour. A creation is made, it is inviolate. So I ask myself, am I so pre-eminent that someone wishes to ruin me? That is hard to believe. I am good, I am very good, at times I have the genius, but I am not *so* good." His eyes and his lips smiled together, as if in huge delight. "Even I, Zana, admit that. So why does it happen? Why do my models desert me? One for this reason, one for that, the good and the bad, the young and the not very young, all of them go. Then the agencies say that they are sorry they can send me no more, there are no more. Lies. Then, and I come now to my great worry, Mr. Rollison, my greatest anxiety. You believe me, please."

Rollison said: "I think I shall believe you. Is it Rose Mary Bell?"

"Yes, of course," said Zana. "My dear, dear Rose Mary. Oh, it is one thing to have a model who is the best in the world. It is a good thing to know that she started with me from nothing. I have an eye for the figure that will wear clothes well. Not too big anywhere"—his hands followed imaginary curves over his own bosom and hips—"not too small." They darted in swift, straight lines. "I discovered Rose Mary: she was beautiful, she had everything exactly right, she was even photogenic. Oh, the trouble I have to keep the Hollywood people away from her, so greedy they are. She becomes famous. She is very, very loyal to me. All the others go, but Rose Mary never. And then—she does not come back. Two days ago she left the

salon. Next day, no Rose Mary. I was very worried. I went to find out why. She did not go home that night. She did not go home yesterday. She is not home now; she has disappeared, and for Rose Mary I am very frightened, Mr. Rollison. Until this disaster I did not know whether to come to you, but quickly I decide. I ask you, find Rose Mary. If while you do that you explain the other things, good. If not——" He broke off, took Rollison's hand again, with his great eyes like shining stars, his mobile mouth working as if he was fighting back tears. "Please, Mr. Rollison," he begged, "find Rose Mary. You see, I love her."

3

CAUSES FOR FEAR

THE face of Hugo Zana missed being grotesque only by a hair's breadth and nothing could save it from being comical. The face of Rose Mary was the face of a Botticelli angel. Yet here was the Beast, declaring his worship of her Beauty as if with a wholly selfless love.

"Please, Mr. Rollison," Zana pleaded, "you believe me?"

"I believe you," Rollison said, and made himself speak briskly. "Will you answer every question I ask, absolutely truthfully?"

"Yes."

"What did the police say when you went to them?"

"That it is too early to say that Rose Mary is missing."

"Did you tell them all you've told me?"

"Everything."

"Whom did you see?"

"Superintendent Grice."

"There isn't a better man. Do you know who is behind this campaign against you?"

Zana's eyes sparkled. "I do not, if I knew I could deal with him myself."

"No ideas?"

"No, none."

"Have you been attacked before to-day?"

"No."

Rollison did not alter his tone or the direction of his gaze as he repeated:

"Have you been attacked before to-day?"

"There is no need to answer more than once."

"Sure you haven't?"

"It has not happened before."

"When did you first see the man who shot at you?"

"Man?" echoed Zana with a shrug. "It was not a man; it was a girl. If you——" He saw the gleam in Rollison's eyes, and doubled his right fist and shook it vigorously; he was never very far from laughter. "You knew it was a girl, you try to trick me into lying to you. But I shall not lie, I tell you everything, I keep nothing back."

"Absolutely nothing?"

"Absolutely."

"Did you recognise the girl?"

"To tell you the truth, I do not know," said Zana, and now he drew his brows together, wrinkling his broad forehead like a bewildered bloodhound. "No, I cannot say yes, I cannot say no. The face I do not remember, but I did not see so much. The figure, yes, perhaps. If she is not a model, she should be. She moves like one, she is built like one. Now there is a body on which I can build clothes, I can stand her there—so!—I can picture just what she needs, I——"

"But you didn't know her well."

"That I am sure about."

"Right, thanks. How many models are still working for you?"

"Two. Oh, I could get the very bad ones, but not anyone will be good enough for the clothes I create, Mr. Rollison! Just now I am working on clothes for the spring. At this time I should be very busy, but instead—all this happens."

"Who else works for you?"

"I have an artist, a man, and a woman who is invaluable to me. I trained them, also. The seamstresses and cutters—there are fifteen altogether, and——"

"Have any of these left your employ recently?"

"Oh, one, perhaps. Even two——"

"Not in the same way that the models have gone?"

"No, not at all!"

"Everything else is normal, but you can't keep models that you do manage to get, and getting new ones is much more difficult that it was."

"Precisely so."

"Have any of them told you why they have left?"

Zana said, very deliberately: "Yes, each of them gives a reason. They go to better themselves. They go because they do not like the work. They go because they are to get married. All good reasons. One or two, perhaps, I believe."

"What do you think is the real reason?"

"I think they go for the same one, each of them," declared Zana. "I think it is because they are frightened. They do not tell me. They do not seem to tell anyone. But I think that is the reason. You are to find out."

"Do you think Rose Mary disappeared because she couldn't be frightened?"

There was a pause.

In it, a change came slowly upon Zana. He raised his hands as if to fend off fear. Horror seemed to creep into his body, and to spread to his eyes, his lips, his whole expression. When he went on, his voice was little above a whisper.

"That is what I fear," he confessed hoarsely. "That they could not frighten her, but that they will try—or else they will make it impossible to use her as a model any more. You know how they would do that." His lips worked, as if the very thought was more than he could bear. "They could spoil her face or they could spoil her beautiful, beautiful body, and—that is why I am so frightened. Mr. Rollison, I beg you to find her."

Rollison moved to the big desk, sat on the corner, and lifted the telephone. Zana did not appear to notice what he was doing, but stood as if the horror was deep within him.

Rollison dialled a number, and after a moment said:

"Is Mr. Ebbutt there?"

A woman asked him to hold on, and he watched Zana as he waited. Zana's lips were beginning to work as if he was fighting for his self-control. There were odd sounds on the telephone, then a wheezing noise, followed by a gruff:

"W'oossat?"

"Hallo, Bill," said Rollison. "Keeping busy?"

"Why, 'allo, Mr. Ar," said Bill, whose other name was Ebbutt. Warmth sprang into his voice. "Wondered when we was going to 'ear from you again, we did. How're tricks?"

"Fine, Bill. I've got a job for you that I don't think Liz would approve of."

Ebbutt gave a sort of a chuckle.

"Sounds right up my street. Give it a name."

"Come round yourself, or send someone as good," said Rollison. "Make it two o'clock, no later, please. I'll have a few dozen photographs ready for you, and I want you to hand them round to your boys. Stick them up in the pub, too. She's a pin-up girl with a vengeance; she's missing, and I'm anxious to find her."

"Cor blimey, Mr. Ar, you don't change a bit!" Ebbutt chuckled and wheezed. "Okay, I'll 'ave some-

one there at two o'clock sharp. Won't be too risquee, will it?"

"Eh?"

"You know, too decollett," Ebbutt said. "Strewth, what's happened to you, Mr. Ar? There won't be too much of a plunge neck-line, will there? Not in the pub, I mean. You know how Liz——"

"Just head, and possibly head and shoulders," Rollison assured him solemnly, and because Zana was watching him, he didn't grin. "Thanks, Bill. One other thing. . . . Bring or send along three or four of the younger chaps who'll take a chance for a bit of bonus and a lot of fun."

"I'll fix it, Mr. Ar."

"Thanks, Bill," said Rollison, and rang off.

Zana had recovered his poise, and his mouth was twitching in a kind of smile. He didn't speak at once, and Rollison went on in exactly the same tone of voice as he had used with Ebbutt:

"Next question: have you told the newspapers?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"When a thing like this happens, they all think the same thing—it is a publicity stunt," declared Zana, "and they brush me off. There have been some big stunts that have succeeded, and the newspapers are very careful these days. Until this morning, also, I hoped she would come back and that I would not have trouble, but now——"

"If I persuade the newspapers that Rose Mary is really missing, is that all right with you?"

Zana hesitated.

"Is it or isn't it?" insisted Rollison.

"It is easier to ask than to answer," Zana said, fire sparking in his eyes again. "What is best for Rose Mary? That every newspaper says she is in danger? Or that they say nothing?"

"What is best for Hugo Zana?" asked Rollison.

"That all the newspapers and therefore all the world knows that he's in serious trouble, and might not be able to get his spring and summer collections ready in time?"

Rollison saw the glitter spring into Zana's eyes, saw the big mouth working, as if he was chewing on non-existent gum, saw his body swaying from the hips in that stance which was so like a boxer's in the ring.

"Am I here to be insulted?" Zana demanded angrily. "There is no spring, no summer, no next year collections —what do I care? Understand me, Rollison, I am a wealthy man, I have all the money I require. I can retire, I can sell my business. It can even be ruined and made worthless, but what do I care? You go about this matter whatever way you like. Never study my feelings, never study anything except—find Rose Mary." He broke off, and then shook a clenched fist. "This Bill, who is he? You start quickly, one good thing. You want pictures of Rose Mary?"

"Dozens of them."

"I have hundreds upon hundreds, a recent photograph taken for publicity only—publicity for Rose Mary, you understand. Shall I telephone for them now?"

"Yes, please," Rollison said. "And I'd like a list of the names and addresses of all the models who've stopped working for you, the agents who won't supply new ones, the girls who still work with you—and I'd better have the names and addresses of all your staff now, from the artists upwards or downwards. Will you arrange that?"

"Two minutes," said Zana, and pounced upon the telephone. "I begin to understand how you have obtained your reputation. I——"

As he touched the telephone, it rang. He was so close that the sudden ringing startled him, and he snatched his hand away. Then his reaction seemed to amuse him, and he gave a fierce grin.

The bell kept ringing.

Rollison stretched across and picked it up. As he

did so he heard Jolly come in and close the front door. Jolly moved towards the rest of the flat, not needing to pass through this room.

"Richard Rollison," Rollison said into the telephone.

"Good morning, Mr. Rollison," a girl said in a pleasant voice. "I've a message for you from Mr. Smith."

"From whom?"

"Mr. Smith," the girl said, as if the name should be as meaningful or as striking as Nat King Cole. "Have you a pencil handy, sir?"

"Yes," said Rollison, and tried to think who Mr. Smith might be, for there were several on his list of acquaintances, although none from whom he expected a message. "Go ahead."

"Thank you. Mr. Smith says that if you attempt to give Mr. Hugo Zana any assistance, you won't live to see the week out. Good morning."

4

ZANA REMEMBERS

ROLLISON put the receiver back slowly, looking very straight at Zana as he did so; and Zana, who would miss very little, obviously guessed that this had been no ordinary call, and waited as if with bated breath.

"They are up to all the tricks," Rollison said, gently. "They must have read a latest crooks' manual."

"What are you talking about?"

"A nice-sounding girl told me that I wouldn't see the week out if I gave you any help," said Rollison, and decided that it was the moment to grin. "This is the time when I ought to call in Jolly, to double the fee! Mr. Smith doesn't want——"

"Who did you say?" Zana shouted, and flung his arms wide, then began to pace the room in long, energetic strides. "Always, always the same. Threatening messages. Do not work for Zana, do not help Zana. Why should it be? Who hates me so much? But—it is time to face the truth." He was no longer gesticulating and his face was set, while his great shining eyes looked as if they could set the Toff on fire. "I understand, it is not work for you. Please forget it, and perhaps——"

He broke off.

After a moment, he approached Rollison slowly, his tread now almost catlike. He took Rollison's arm and stared fiercely into his face.

"Perhaps if I give up my business I will have no more trouble. Perhaps Rose Mary will not be hurt. I cannot ask you to take such risks."

"You could give me some facts," Rollison said dryly. "What about a Mr. Smith. Do you know him?"

"I know dozens of him."

"Anyone who hates you for being alive?"

"No," said Zana after a moment's reflection. "No Mr. Smith is important to me, or me to him as far as I know. But I know that some of the girls have been threatened, told they will be injured or disfigured, if they work for me. So they have gone."

"Do you know anyone who hates you so much that he would like to ruin you?"

"No," Zana said after another brief pause, as if he wanted to make quite sure. "Business rivals, yes, but no longer do I think it possible that any one of these is involved. Anyone else? I can think of no one. I only know that all this is happening, but it is wrong to ask others to take such risks for me. I shall give up. Now, may I use the telephone?"

"Yes."

"Thank you." Zana pounced upon the instrument again, as if to make sure that this time he got in first.

He dialled with a kind of restrained energy, while Rollison moved to the door and saw Jolly at the front door, using a small gouge to prise the bullet out. While Zana was still waiting, Rollison crossed to Jolly, who was making a neat hole about the bullet, and would soon have it free.

"Don't stop," said Rollison. "Learn anything?"

"It was a black Ford *Consul*, sir, which turned right into Piccadilly."

"So it might have gone anywhere from Hyde Park Corner," Rollison reflected. "Who told you?"

"The butcher's roundsman happened to be near the corner when the car appeared, and remarked upon the fact that it was going very fast."

"Did he see who was in it?"

"A man was driving and a young woman was next to him. The woman was nearest the roundsman, who failed to get a good view of the driver. The woman was most attractive, he said, fair-haired, and——"

"That squares with her figure," said Rollison, and paused when he heard Zana burst into a flood of orders. He grinned as the hard voice with its heavy accent came like a series of short bursts on a machine-gun. "Jolly."

"Sir?"

"A Mr. Smith has said that we will not see the week out if we help Zana, and Zana wishes us to leave him to his own devices."

"Indeed, sir." Jolly seemed to be clenching his teeth and making a final effort. "I don't think I know Mr. Smith. Just one moment, I think—ah." He put the gouge aside, and took out a pair of steel calipers, gripped the bullet in these and pulled it out. "There you are, sir. A .22, which rather tallies with the sound of the report, doesn't it? That is the size of an automatic that a woman might be expected to use, too. Did Mr. Smith say anything else?"

"No. Hark at old clackity-clack in there. You'd

think his voice would drive away his models whenever he gets excited. Jolly, listen." Rollison told his man exactly what he had arranged, while he rolled the bullet round and round on the palm of his hand, only just preventing it from falling. "Now we have a lot to do, so we'll postpone Sir Frederick Symes until another, lighter day. Telephone or write to him with our apologies."

"Very good, sir, and thank you."

"Forget it. As soon as the names and addresses arrive, ask Zana to indicate those girls who really left him to better themselves, and those who left without any known good reason. When Bill Ebbutt's boys arrive, divide the names and addresses up between them, and ask them to check that everything is all right with the girls where they're working now, whether they've moved their homes—all that kind of thing. A general comprehensive report on each, and they needn't try to be discreet—let 'em tread heavy and tell the world that the Toff would like to know about these girls."

"Yes, sir."

"Better warn 'em that it could become dangerous; they're not to take too many chances," Rollison added thoughtfully.

"That will be somewhat superfluous with Ebbutt's men, sir, but I understand what you mean."

"Hmm. Finally, ask each one to telephone reports, and you stay here and take the messages," Rollison went on. "Don't go out unless in acute emergency, and if you have to leave, try to make sure that someone's here. Because when Mr. Smith knows that we're really in business, he may come and give us a surprise packet. He's doing everything else in the book. Take more than ordinary precautions about letting anyone in."

"Very good," said Jolly, quite unperturbed. "Will you look after the bullet, sir?"

"Yes. I'm going to see Grice, and then look in at

Fleet Street," Rollison told him. "I'll try to arrange for most of the newspapers to carry the story in the morning." He heard a sharp sound in the other room as Zana replaced the receiver, smiled faintly, and went on in a soft voice: "I'd like to learn more about Zana, too. Don't ever try to wrestle with him, Jolly."

He went into the big room.

Zana was standing by the telephone, looking restless and thwarted. As Rollison held out the bullet he made as if to grab it, but Rollison closed his fingers over it. "I'll keep it," he said, "but if that had caught you in the head, throat or one or two other places, it could have done a lot of damage. When did you see this girl?"

"Twice," said Zana promptly. "First, when she was outside the *salon*, this morning. That was when I realised what a good model she would make. I can remember more now. She turned away quickly as if to make sure that I did not see her well. And next time I saw her because I heard someone behind me, outside there, and turned round. If I had not—but I did, what does the rest matter?"

"Still not sure where you've seen her before?"

"I am trying to remember, but—I see so many girls, so very many. But I do not often forget completely; it will come back." Zana tapped his forehead vigorously. "Not that it is important now. You understand I am most grateful for the time you have given me, and——"

"Zana," said Rollison, gently, "I took on a job. I am still on that job, and with luck we'll both be alive when it's over."

Zana tried to speak, but could not.

"Go back to the *salon*," went on Rollison, "and telephone all the agencies, ask them for models, and try to find out why they won't send any. Don't shout abuse at them; just try sweet reason."

"I would like to crack their heads together," growled

Zana, "but it is apparent that you will not give up, so I shall obey. And I salute a brave man. What are *you* going to do?"

"Look for Mr. Smith," said Rollison.

* * * *

In fact he left the flat before Zana, going out the back way, and was at a corner of Gresham Terrace when Zana appeared at the front door. The designer had apparently come by taxi; now, he walked briskly towards Piccadilly, his shoulders squared and his chin thrust out, as if defying the world to attack him. He looked straight ahead, but Rollison watched all directions, until he felt sure that no one was following Zana.

Zana took a taxi in Piccadilly.

Rollison hurried to his lock-up garage in a mews near Gresham Terrace, and took out his newest toy—a scarlet Bristol with a palpitating burst of speed. But he drove sedately to Scotland Yard, checking in his mirror all the time, and seeing no one who seemed to take any special interest in him.

He drove round Parliament Square, making quite sure that he wasn't followed, and then went along the Embankment and turned into the pale grey building of New Scotland Yard, where the Criminal Investigation Department was housed. Policemen in uniform saluted him. He asked at the hall for Superintendent Grice, waited two minutes, and was told to go straight up. He knew this part of the Yard almost as well as he knew his own flat, and soon tapped lightly on the door of Grice's office.

"Come in," called Grice, and stood up from his desk, a tall man dressed in brown, with thinning and greying brown hair, a sallow skin stretched tight and white across the high bridge of his nose. The office was long and narrow, with two windows overlooking the Embankment; the windows were open, traffic noises came in,

and the room was comparatively cool. "Hallo, Rolly," Grice went on. "I didn't think it would be long before you turned up. Sit down. Have a cigarette."

"Thanks," said Rollison, and relaxed in a green armchair, while Grice sat in a swivel chair behind his desk.

"Zana, of course," went on Grice.

"What do you know about him?" countered Rollison.

"Not really a great deal," said Grice, "and nothing to his discredit. He had a rough time in concentration camps during the war, escaped by getting over a barbed-wire fence, and later swimming the Moselle near Coblenz. He spent the rest of the war helping others to escape from Germany and Italy into Switzerland, and then settled in Paris. He's undoubtedly got a flair; he's the only complete new-comer to break into the big dressmakers' ring for a long time, and he's made a fortune with his designing."

"Really wealthy?"

"So the evidence says."

"Why doesn't he buy a yacht and a villa in Monte Carlo?" Rollison asked, as if of himself. "What do you make of this story of the models who won't stay with him?"

"It could be that they're scared off," Grice conceded. "It could also be that he smells. Or else they don't like the way he expects them to behave."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning that he might paw them a lot."

"Could be," agreed Rollison, "but he wouldn't be likely to start that suddenly, and they were all pretty loyal until twelve months or so ago. Any evidence of petting and pawing?"

"No."

"Any evidence of trouble for his models?"

"Well, yes and no," Grice said. "We checked with one or two after Zana came here. They wouldn't say why they left, but we did discover one who'd had vitriol

thrown at her, and left Zana soon afterwards. We couldn't question the girl; she's left the country."

"Sure?"

"She's in Canada—no doubt about it. There was another model who had an accident which ruined her career," Grice went on. "There's no evidence that it wasn't an accident, but when added to the rest, it's peculiar."

"Have you tackled the agencies?" asked Rollinson.

"They say the girls who go to Zana soon get scared, and Zana has now such an unsavoury reputation that they won't recommend anyone."

"Mm," murmured Rollinson, and smiled. "Nice of you to be so ready to answer, Bill. Anything about this Rose Mary?"

"The known facts about her are that she went to her apartment in Chelsea the evening before last, packed a bag, and left home the same night," Grice said. "There's nothing positive to suggest that she was persuaded to go, nothing to suggest that she didn't leave of her own free will. The same applies to all the others, Rolly, so you're probably wasting your time. We're keeping our ears open of course."

"Mm," said Rollinson again, and took the .22 bullet out of his pocket. "Here's a pretty little thing, a very pretty lethal time-waster, too."

Grice's mood changed on an instant as he leaned forward to take it.

"Where did that come?"

"My front door, after missing Zana by inches. A certain Mr. Smith doesn't want me to help him."

Grice was sharp: "When was this?"

"An hour or so ago."

"Are you committed to helping Zana?"

"Yes."

"Don't take any chances with things like this flying about," said Grice urgently. "I'll have it sent up the

Ballistics; there's just a chance they've got one with the same rifling."

"If they haven't, there may be some later," remarked Rollison. "I've come round to the view that Zana's in real trouble, Bill. You haven't any idea why, have you?"

"No," Grice answered. "We've been checking quietly and I've told you all we know. After this we'll step up the pace. If you——"

"Bill," interrupted Rollison apologetically, "mine not to reason with you, but could you pretend to the world that you know nothing about this, yet? No official story of a shooting, I mean. Nothing to suggest to Mr. Smith that I've told you about it. Let him think that I'm playing big lone wolf. That way I fancy he might take more chances than if he thinks you're on his tail."

Grice's expression showed obvious suspicion.

"What's really on your mind?"

"Hope, mostly," Rollison said. "Here's what I've done so far." He talked briskly, and Grice made notes, until the whole tale was told. Then Rollison sat back easily and said: "The key to it all may be the method Mr. Smith uses to frighten the models off. Don't you tackle them openly yet, though; leave that to Ebbutt's men. If they get a line that's worth following up, I'll pass it on to you. And never tell me again that the Toff doesn't consult the police at every stage in an investigation," Rollison added virtuously. "No sober citizen could do more."

"I'm already wondering why you're behaving yourself for a change," said Grice, "but that'll reveal itself as we go on. At least I'll talk to the Assistant Commissioner, and let you know what he says. He might decide that we've got to take the case up in a big way. This bullet——"

"Could have been meant to kill and could have been meant to frighten," Rollison said, and stood up and

pushed his chair back. "All right, Bill, and thanks for listening."

"Where are you off to now?"

"I'm going to see a girl about a job," Rollison said, and winked, and went out.

He was half-way along the passage towards the lift when the door opened and Grice called him; he turned round, expecting some last moment exhortation, but instead Grice beckoned and said:

"Telephone for you."

"But only Jolly knows I'm here," objected Rollison, and went back at the double. "Thanks, Bill . . . Hallo, Jolly?"

"I thought I ought to tell you this at once, sir," said Jolly in his calmest voice. "Mr. Zana has just telephoned to say that he remembers where he has seen that girl before. She is a Beryl Ward, who acted as a relief model for him some time ago, and, according to his records, she lives at Flat 19, Hill Court, St. John's Wood."

"Fine, thanks," said Rollison briskly. "I'll look her up at once." He rang off and smiled brightly at Grice, knowing that if Grice had this information he would have to take swift action. "Urgent message from my Aunt Gloria," he went on. "I hope I'm not going to have any distractions. Thanks again, Bill."

Grice said: "One of these days you'll lie to me and wish you hadn't."

"Oh, William," protested Rollison, "where is your charity?"

He winked, and went.

* * * * *

Instead of going to Fleet Street, he telephoned a friend of a friend on a large news agency, and so made reasonably certain that the disappearance of Zana's Rose Mary would make news. Then he hurried to the address which Jolly had given him.

5

BERYL WARD

HILL COURT was a group of blocks of flats, overlooking Regent's Park. It was surrounded by well-kept lawns and a few small trees, and outside it were a dozen cars. It was not a place of luxury, and Rollison knew that the first block contained only very small flats, mostly shared by two girls, some by married couples. It was the kind of place where a successful model who hadn't yet made a big name might be expected to live.

Rollison left his car five minutes' walk away, after pulling on a pair of thin cotton gloves.

As he passed the cars parked near the flats, he looked for a black Consul. There were green, red, grey and white Consuls, but not one in black. Pity. He reached the spacious entrance, where once a porter had been on duty all the time, but now there was a sign reading: *Ring for Porter*. Rollison went to the lift and studied the plaque on it, showing where the flats were; Number 19 was in the first floor.

He went up.

The whole place was quiet. It was nearly two o'clock, hardly siesta hour, but most of the residents here would be out during the day, and he hoped that Beryl Ward would be. He blessed Zana's good memory; if the luck broke his way, he might know a lot more about this Beryl within the next half hour.

Flat 19 obviously overlooked the park, for a passage window near it did, and he could see the people on the grass under the trees, and some walking; a peaceful London scene. Several youths were kicking a football about, and others were still faithful to cricket.

Rollison listened at the door of the flat, and heard nothing.

He rang the bell; and there was no response.

He rang again, to make sure.

He studied the lock, a Landon, which it would be difficult to force without doing damage, and wasn't sure that he wanted anyone to know that a visitor had been here. Once this was forced it would need expert repair. He went to the passage window and looked out, seeing that a window of the flat was almost within reach. The street was empty, and the people in the park were some distance off; there was a good chance that he wouldn't be seen if he climbed.

He opened the window wide, and got out.

It was child's play, with only a thirty-feet drop, and he swung easily from this window to Beryl Ward's, which had a small balcony; in a moment he was on the balcony and scanning the park, trying to make out whether he had been noticed. No one appeared to be interested. He turned to the window, which was open a couple of inches at the top; this was his day, for he had only to push a little to open it wide enough to get inside.

He closed it again, behind him.

The flat itself seemed strangely quiet, with all the distant noises dulled. Rollison was in a small living-room, with a couch and easy chairs, a fourteen-inch screen television set in a corner, more books than in many homes, mostly on shelves which reached from floor to ceiling of one wall. There was an atmosphere of comfort, as if the girl had all the money she needed.

Did Mr. Smith pay well?

Against one wall was a small walnut writing-desk, and Rollison tried it and found it locked.

"That's fine," he said *sotto voce*; "it'll be worth looking through." He didn't try to force the lock at first, but went out of this room into a tiny lobby. Two other doors led off this, and beyond one was a bedroom; he

could see the head of the bed. The other was a kitchenette. He put his head round the kitchenette, and saw another door which led to a bathroom; obviously this could be entered from both bedroom and kitchen.

"Nice and compact," he observed, and backed out, and looked into the bedroom.

There was Beryl Ward, on the floor.

There was a bullet hole in her forehead.

* * * *

The sight of the girl's body struck home with savage force. It was almost as if Rollison had been viciously attacked. He stood quite still, one hand raised, and felt as if ice was forming in his veins. For several long moments he couldn't move and didn't try to think, but gradually he began to thaw.

He went nearer the girl.

She was very attractive, and the little hole in her forehead hardly affected her looks; it was almost possible to forget that it was there. She wore the suit Rollison had seen before, the skirt rucked up a little. She lay on her side, facing him, curled up a little in a cat-like way. Her complexion was beautiful, and there was an illusion of movement at her lips.

Rollison bent over her.

Her hand was warm, but her pulse was still. She hadn't been dead very long; an hour or so, at most. He made absolutely sure that she was dead, and stood up; his jaw seemed to be locked, for this was such a waste of beauty and of youth, and it changed so many things.

There was no other door leading out of the flat; the front door was closed and certainly hadn't been forced open, so someone with a key had come in here and done this thing. It looked as if she had been sitting on a dressing-table stool, and had twisted round to see her killer; that killer had stood close before he or she had squeezed the trigger.

This girl had looked into the face of death and recognised it.

Rollison stood up. He could search the flat quickly, but doubted whether he would discover anything of interest. The killer would not have left anything for the police to find; and the police were bound to find the body soon. Should he, Rollison, send for them? He didn't think more about that then, but turned towards the living-room and the writing-desk, taking a knife from his pocket. One of its blades was a pick-lock.

He was within two strides of the open door of the room when he heard the sound.

It came from inside the room; just a faint rustling which he might easily had missed. But he was quite sure that it was there.

That was the moment of great danger and great testing. He had to wrench his mind from the sight of the dead girl towards this new fact, this threat—for could any person hiding there be anything but a threat? If he revealed the fact that he had heard, he would bring the other into the open, and——

It might be the killer, who still had bullets in his gun.

Rollison actually touched the door and pushed it open, and as he did so, exclaimed as if in annoyance, and said:

"To hell with it!"

He swung round and went back to the bedroom. There the girl lay, still and dead, and nothing had changed but the beating of his heart. Danger was like the fluttering of wings about his head and within him. He could creep across to the bathroom and then to the kitchen, but that wouldn't help; there was only one way into the living-room, and from whichever door he entered the lobby, he would be seen.

If the unknown had meant to kill, wouldn't the shot have been fired by now?

Rollison went to the girl and picked up her hand-

bag, which was open on the dressing-table. This was simply for the sake of doing something, to fool the other man.

Man?

There were the usual oddments, a purse, several pound notes, nothing of interest to him. But Rollison had recovered his poise completely, and knew exactly what he wanted to do.

There was no gun in the girl's bag, or in sight, and he felt sure that the wound in her forehead had been caused by a .22.

He went back to the lobby.

The door was open, as he had left it.

"I'll just have a look in that bureau," he said aloud, and hoped that it didn't sound to stagey for whoever was outside. "Then I'd better call Grice. Must be a telephone here."

He strode forward, knowing that there was only one place for the other to hide—behind the door. He pushed it back gently at first, and then flung it so that it crashed back. He leapt inside and swung round as the door bounced back and a man cried out in mingled pain and fear.

He was young.

There was a gun in his hand, but it wasn't poised; for that vital second he was off his balance, and staggering. He tried to get the gun up in time, but Rollison smashed a blow at his jaw and connected with a sharp crack which had an ominous sound. The man crumpled up and the gun dropped, falling heavily. Then it was hidden by his body, and he fell in much the same position as the dead girl.

Rollison stood back, breathing hard and rubbing his knuckles, but that was only for a moment. The man wasn't likely to be out for many minutes, but those minutes would be enough. Rollison bent down and ran through his pockets, taking out everything that might

be useful. He put them in his own pockets, and then drew back.

The one certain thing was this man's name: Percival James Harrison. He was already stirring and his eyelids were flickering.

Rollison gripped his coat lapels, hauled him to his feet, and dragged him into the bathroom. He tied his hands behind him with a tie, then hoisted him up, and draped his coat collar over the hook at the back of the bathroom door. Percival James Harrison hung helplessly, his eyelids fluttering, his mouth working. Rollison swung round towards the bath, saw the shiny chromium of the shower equipment, switched the shower on, and turned the tap full on to the man's face.

Water smacked on to it. Harrison gasped and began to kick out and to wriggle. As his coat became soaked his eyes opened wider, only to close again as the water struck them.

Rollison turned it off.

"All right," he said savagely, "you're going to talk now, or I'll dump you in that tub and leave you to drown. Who's this man Smith?"

The man's mouth worked, water dripped from his hair and his face, gathering in a large pool at his feet, trickling all over the place. His hair was plastered over his forehead now, shiny black hair. He seemed to be trying to speak, and Rollison gave him thirty seconds to recover his voice, and then asked in the same savage voice:

"Answer me. Who's Smith?"

"I—I don't know. I don't——"

Rollison slapped him across the face four times in quick succession, making his head swivel as if on a hinge, and fear leapt into the other's brown eyes.

"Come on, who's Smith?" Rollison demanded. "You haven't a chance of holding out on me. Don't waste our time. Who is he? Why did you kill Beryl Ward?"

"I—I—I——" Harrison began, and then gabbled something which might have been: "I had my orders." And that was what he might be expected to say, that he'd had orders from a man he didn't know, but—he might know, and if he did he wouldn't be likely to hold out for long.

"I'll give you one more chance," Rollison said roughly, "and if you don't tell me the truth I'll really get to work on you. Who—is—Smith?"

His prisoner just stared, water dripping, mouth working, as if even fear could not drive him to give the right answer. Rollison raised his hand, ready to strike and to strike again until he was dizzy with pain—but for that moment there was silence.

In it, a bell rang.

It wasn't a telephone, it was too short and sharp; so it was the front door.

6

CLOSE SHAVE

THE man hanging behind the door turned his frightened eyes towards the sound of the ringing, as if that frightened him still more. Rollison picked up a bath towel, and before the man knew what he was going to do, draped it over him and tied two ends behind him, pulling them as tightly as he could, so the man was underneath a kind of cowl, and his cries wouldn't be heard.

The bell rang again.

Rollison moved swiftly towards the lobby, and as he opened the bathroom door, heard a man speak but didn't catch the words. He left the door ajar, and crept forward. Then he saw the letter-box open, and a thick finger poke through; he stood flat against the wall, just out of sight.

A man said: "I'm sure it was this corner flat."

"Sure it wasn't higher?"

"It was next to that red tower."

"I'll try again," the second man said. The bel jarred, the letter-box snapped back, and the next word were muffled: "I can't see anyone."

"I'm positive this was the one. I saw him climb o to the balcony and then into the room; I was lying o the grass over there, sunning myself, and just happene to look up. Big, dark-haired chap, he was."

"The porter will soon be here; he'll have his pas key," said the first man. "Take it easy."

Rollison moved into the bedroom. Outside, a ma started whistling, and shuffling his feet. Another walke away. Rollison stepped over the girl's body and opene the drawers of the dressing-table, but found nothin likely to help him, no books, no letters; nothing. H moved away swiftly, and had to step over her bod again. The savage anger which he felt towards th killer was greater than ever, but he dared not stay here If he was found here he would have to be held, Gric or no Grice, and would probably be charged for illega entry, if nothing worse. At least he had made no print

He picked up a small leather-and-canvas hold-all an went into the living-room.

A chair was out of place, and the writing-desk seeme to mock him, with its closed lid and its closed, locke drawers. He reached it in two strides, and used hi skeleton key. His ears were strained to catch any soun that the men were making, and for any from outsid He imagined that one policeman was in the hall; th man might have sent for reinforcements, or might b preparing to handle this for himself, and so win all th glory.

The lock of the desk clicked back.

Rollison opened the desk and was met with an arra of pigeon-holes, many of them filled with letters, sma

books, bills, and various oddments. He took each one out and put it in the hold-all, leaving behind only pens and pencils and unused paper and envelopes. He thought he heard someone hurrying along the passage, but there was no one outside. He strode across, closed and locked the door to the lobby, and turned back to the desk. The drawers had all been unlocked with the main drawer, and he pulled open each one. There were no papers, but two boxes of chocolates, some wrapping paper, two small empty cardboard boxes, and a zip-type brief-holder. He unzipped this swiftly; it was empty. He didn't waste time closing the drawers of the desk, but stepped to the open window, stood by one side, and looked out.

Not far away, walking purposefully, and with several small boys trailing behind him, was a large policeman. He was heading for this corner, and it seemed certain that he would be one of several on the way.

Then a shout came from the passage:

"Coming!"

Rollison stepped out on to the balcony. The approaching policeman was still fifty yards away, and could see him. Two of the boys pointed eagerly. Rollison gripped the leather handles of the hold-all between his teeth, held the railing of the balcony, and swung over. He lowered himself cautiously, as a man shouted:

"Oi! Look there!"

Rollison dropped.

If he hurt his leg or ankle now, he would really be in trouble, but he landed squarely. A police whistle shrilled out, but the large policeman and the escort of boys were out of sight from here, hidden by a thick hedge. Rollison turned and raced towards the far corner of the grounds and the building, hearing that whistle shrilling, knowing that it would be touch and go.

He reached the corner.

No one was in sight, but beyond was the road, the

parked cars, and almost certainly people at windows, seeing without being seen. There was something else, resting against the wall: two bicycles. He ran to one and snatched it, swung his leg over, and pedalled towards a narrow doorway at one side of the grounds. The door was ajar. He didn't get off, but bumped it open with the front tyre, and pedalled furiously along a service alley towards the street.

The whistle sounded farther away.

Rollison reached the end of the alley, jammed on the brakes, and nearly pitched himself over the handlebars. He let the bicycle fall as he sprang off, and then turned into the road, walking smartly; a running man would invite attention. Several people were in sight, but all of them were standing still and looking towards the sound of the whistle, not towards Rollinson.

His car was only just round the corner.

He reached the corner as a police car appeared, travelling very fast; two uniformed men were in it. They gave him only a quick glance. He still showed no sign of haste, but walked to his car, which wasn't locked. He slid behind the wheel, tossed the bag to the back, and drove away.

Five minutes later he felt that he was safe. Grice might guess a lot, but could never prove who had been at Beryl Ward's flat.

By now her body would have been discovered, and Harrison would have been found behind the bathroom door.

With luck he would pay the penalty for murder.

* * * *

Rollison did not go straight to Gresham Terrace, but to another part of the West End, a small, graceful square, with a grass patch in the middle and plane trees all around, and even a nursemaid and two children idling on the grass. A white smooth-haired terrier frisked. It

had become much warmer, and Rollison was sweating a little as he stepped out of the car and approached one of the tall houses in the square. There was a brass plate by the side of the door, but it did not announce a doctor or a dentist; it said quite simply:

The Marigold Club

This club was a private one, and it was run by Rollison's aunt, Lady Gloria Hurst, for young women who found such a residential club in London a great boon. Many did. It was quite small, yet a room or two was always empty for an emergency.

Rollison rang the bell.

The door was opened by a middle-aged woman, whose face brightened at sight of him as she said:

"Hallo, Mr. Rollison. You're quite a stranger."

"I try to put everything right," said Rollison brightly. "Hallo, Ethel. Is my aunt in?"

"Yes, but I don't like disturbing her before three o'clock; she is getting on, you know. Still, if it's urgent——"

"Find me a quiet spot, a sandwich and a cup of coffee, and three o'clock will be fine," said Rollison, and Ethel the club's housekeeper, closed the door and led him along a wide passage to a room on the right. She opened this door and stood aside for him to enter. Beyond, a small room was tall and gracious, like the rest of the house, furnished in more Georgian than Victorian fashion. There were several small tables in the middle, and other tables round the walls, as in a writing-room at a private hotel.

"Very hungry?" the housekeeper asked.

"Famished, in fact," Rollison confessed.

"I'll see what cook can do," she said.

"Ethel, you're the most understanding woman I know. By the way, is Lady Maude still a resident here?"

"Oh, yes."

"Thanks. Is she busy?"

"I don't really know, Mr. Rollison, but Lady Gloria will."

"Call Lady Gloria on the dot of three, will you, and tell her I'm waiting," said Rollison, and smiled as Ethel went off.

He put the hold-all on to one of the side tables, sat down, opened it, and took out all the contents. Then he emptied his pockets. The room was bright and airy, even a little cold, but he did not notice that. He turned over everything he had found, letters, diaries, address-book, bank statements, some files of correspondence, receipts for stock and share certificates, some Government securities, including a Post Office Savings Bank book with several hundred pounds in credit.

All of these were in the name of Miss Beryl Ward.

There was a photograph album, and she had photographed well; almost as well as the missing Rose Mary Bell.

Rollison studied the diary, but there were no entries for the past few days, no notes about Zana, nothing that helped him. He turned next to the letters, but these seemed to be from friends—one from an Uncle Wilf in Torquay—and nothing helpful at all.

He had only the address book left.

There was a tap on the door, and the housekeeper came in carrying a tray, a pile of sandwiches which would have been enough for two normally hungry people, some coffee and a dish of trifle. She spread a small cloth over one of the card-tables and said:

"I hope that will make you feel better!"

"I feel better already," said Rollison, and shifted his chair purposefully.

It was nearly twenty to three, and he was ravenously hungry. He finished the sandwiches and the trifle before feeling that he'd had enough, then poured out coffee

and took it back to the table where the papers were. He turned to the Index page B, for Rose Mary Bell: and there was her name and her address, exactly as Zana had given it to him.

There was Zana's private address, as well as the address of his *salon*.

There was the address of Percival James Harrison, too —the same as on the letters Rollison had found on the man whom he had left behind the bathroom door.

Until he could compare this with a fuller list he couldn't be sure that all of Zana's models were on it, but against several of the names of girls was a small "z".

Coincidence?

He finished his coffee. In a few minutes he would be commanded to the presence of Lady Gloria Hurst, not only his aunt, but the one and only relative for whom he had both regard and affection. Ethel was sure to call her on the stroke of three. Rollison glanced through the papers again, found nothing more of interest, and picked up the photograph album to run through it. Most of the photographs were of young women, all were very lovely, and loveliest of them all was undoubtedly Rose Mary.

Why shouldn't Beryl Ward keep a photograph album?

What——

A small photograph slipped to the floor from one of the pages he hadn't yet opened. He bent down to pick it up and glanced at it with cursory interest—and then went almost as still as he had at the sight of Beryl Ward's body.

This was a photograph of a woman, too. Judging from the hair, she was young. It was impossible to be sure from the face. Two scars, one on each cheek, had ruined any beauty that she had ever had.

This was probably the girl now in Canada.

Rollison kept staring at it, and then turned it over, but apart from some kind of print number, in faded

blue rubber stamping, there was nothing more to see. He turned it back—and as he did so there was another tap at the door.

The summons was very prompt; it was not yet quite three.

"Coming," he called, and put the photograph back very slowly.

The door opened.

"You haven't been called to the presence yet," said the girl who came in, smiling. "Ethel said you asked whether I was busy, and I'm seldom too busy for you. What do you want this time, Richard?"

Rollison didn't answer.

The other stared back, her smile becoming a little set, for she could not understand the expression in his eyes. She didn't come any further into the room, but waited. She was of medium height, no more than twenty-four or five, with naturally fair hair, professionally waved, and a fresh, open face—the English country-girl kind of face, with the bloom of health on her cheeks, and ripeness on her lips. She was Lady Maude Dennison, a ward of Rollison's aunt, and once before she had helped Rollison by acting as a decoy to a bad man.

"Rolly, what's the matter with you?" she asked at last.

"Matter?" ejaculated Rollison, and then jolted himself out of the mood. "Sorry, my sweet. I was going to ask you to become a famous dress designer's model, but I think I've decided not to."

"I haven't changed *that* much!"

"No, you haven't changed," he said. "You do the impossible and look lovelier every time, but I think I've learned what might happen to you if anything went wrong. So——"

He broke off.

"I think I want to know more about this," said Maude in a quiet voice, and did not look away from him.

Rollison didn't answer at first, for he heard footsteps outside, and prepared to meet his aunt, an encounter never faced lightly. Lady Gloria opened the door wide with the stick she always used when walking, although she stood as upright as a post for all her seventy-nine years. She wore a dark blue dress, tight at her remarkable wasp waist, and wore a lace net collar, held up by small supports, as if she meant to make sure that her head could never droop.

"And if Maude wants to learn more she'll learn it," she declared. "Good afternoon, Richard. Isn't it time you came to see me out of a sense of duty and not because you require help?" Her grey eyes glinted as Rollison stepped forward, took her free hand, and dutifully kissed her cheek. "*I* think it is, whatever you may."

"I couldn't agree more," said Rollison earnestly, "but I was always a reprobate, so you'll have to forgive me." He squeezed her hand. "In any case, you'd scare me away."

"*I* scare *you*?"

"You won't teach me the trick of looking younger every time you see me," protested Rollison. "I simply can't compete."

"You can come along to my room and tell me what you want," said Lady Gloria, obviously pleased. "Life has been very humdrum lately, I could do with a little excitement. May Maude come, too?"

"Maude may," agreed Rollison, "but I'd rather talk here. I'm in a greater hurry than usual." He looked from the old woman to the young one, and went on in a tone which they knew proved that he was in most deadly earnest. "I wanted Maude to go as a model for one of the big dress designers; most of his others have been frightened away, and he wants to find out how. I think I've found out, but still don't know why. Among other things, they are being threatened with vitriol in the face. I'll find out why some other way."

His aunt said: "I see, Richard. Yes, I think you'd better. And you'd better be careful yourself."

Then Maude asked:

"Who is it, Rolly? Hugo Zana?"

7

MODEL FOR ZANA

"YES," answered Rollison very softly, "it's Hugo Zana, Maude. How did you come to guess so quickly?"

"It wasn't very difficult," said Maude; "it's common knowledge that he can't keep his models any longer. At least two agents have advised friends of mine not to work for Zana. They haven't said why, but——" she shrugged. "You know how it is, sometimes."

"Do you mean he expects his models to sleep with him?" demanded Lady Gloria. "If you do, say so."

"It's not so specific as that," said Maude. "In fact it isn't specific at all; it's just a kind of general warning. When good agents give you that advice, it's time to take it. Besides——"

"Besides what?" asked Rollison, still very softly.

"Well, there are some facts to face, aren't there?" asked Maude, moving towards a chair and turning it round so that Lady Gloria could sit down; but Lady Gloria preferred to stand. "Several of Zana's models have had bad luck ever since they went to work for him. One girl had a shocking accident, and isn't ever likely to walk again. It's just—well, it's just that it doesn't seem very pleasant to work for Zana."

"I still think you're talking in circles, Maude," said Lady Gloria accusingly, "and if you don't know Richard well enough to know that he didn't come here to waste

his time, then you should. What are the reasons for models not wishing to work for Hugo Zana? Not so long ago that was considered the height of a model's ambition."

"It was even a year ago," agreed Maude. "But somehow—well, they say that he loses his self-control without any warning, he rants and raves, that he's—well, he's simply going mad."

"Who are 'they'?" inquired Rollison.

"Oh—people."

"If the truth be known, this is probably simply rumour against the man," said Lady Gloria. "You can't support your case with facts, Maude, can you?"

"Well——"

"Have *you* seen Zana in one of these spasms?"

"No, but——"

"Have any of your friends?"

"Well, not exactly, but——"

"Just friends of friends," said Lady Gloria with a sniff, and glared at Rollison. "I don't see why you should stand there and grin like a Cheshire cat. It's quite obvious that you didn't know what was being said about Zana, and yet you appear to want to find out why his models leave him. If they have reason to believe that he is a sex maniac, which is what Maude is really implying——"

"Oh, nonsense, Lady Gloria," Maude said sharply. "I was only trying to explain what I've heard." She looked intently at Rollison. "*Has* Zana asked you to find out why his models have left him?"

"Nice to be consulted," mumbled Rollison, looking warily at his aunt. "Yes."

"In which case, he can't know, and if he was driving them away by his own behaviour he'd hardly be unaware of it," said Lady Gloria, flatly. "Well, Richard, you say you haven't any time to waste, but you don't seem to be making very good use of what time you are

spending with us. Do you want Maude's help, or don't you?"

"I think I'm frightened of asking for it."

"No need for you to be frightened; that's up to her," said Lady Gloria. "What do you think, Maude?"

"I think I should like to model for Zana," said Maude, thoughtfully, "but I'd want to make one absolute condition."

"What's that?"

"That he designs an evening gown especially for *me*."

There was a moment of startled silence.

Next moment, Lady Gloria laughed more loudly and more deeply than Rollison had heard for many a year; and he was chuckling, too.

* * * *

It wasn't a laughing matter.

Beryl Ward was dead, and one model had been gravely injured, another scarred hideously, and for life. The police were uneasy.

Why was it happening?

Who was this Mr. Smith, and what did he want from Zana?

* * * *

Rollison put the bag and papers in his car, left the car in this quiet square, walked towards Oxford Street, and was lucky in spotting an empty taxi within three minutes. He sank down in a corner after saying: "Zana *salon*, Brigham Square," and lit a cigarette, screwing up his eyes as he pondered over his aunt, who had not changed at all, and over Maude Dennison's obvious eagerness to help. Knowing Maude, he could be reasonably sure that even if he tried to stop her she would apply to Zana for work, and as Zana was in such need, he would probably take her on. So it would be better to have Maude well disposed.

Rollison still didn't like the idea.

Nor did he like the sight of the two policemen standing outside the house where Zana staged his shows and created his fashions and his clothes. This was a larger, busier, bustling square, with hardly room to park; and Superintendent Grice's car was double parked outside the door where another brass plate said simply: *Zana.* Just inside the door was a detective in plain clothes, and as Rollison entered the man smiled frostily in recognition.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rollison, we've been looking for you."

"And I found you, so it works out all right. What's on?" Rollison did not want to ask the obvious question: was Zana all right, or had he been attacked? Or had Rose Mary been found? If she had, and it had brought Grice and his men, then it wasn't likely that she had been found alive.

More likely, Harrison had recognised and named him to the police.

"Mr. Grice is with Mr. Zana now," the man said.

"Tell them I'm here, will you?" asked Rollison, and made no attempt to look unconcerned. He did not need to dissimulate for long, for a door opened and Grice appeared. He looked gaunt and grim against the background of the cream painted walls, with intricate patterns picked out in gilt, and his footsteps sounded in spite of the thick, off-white carpet which stretched from wall to wall in the hall and along several passages.

He stopped abruptly.

"I want to see you," he said. "We'll talk at the Yard."

Behind him came Zana. The designer looked angry and his fists were clenched; it was easy to imagine the bunched muscles of his arms; easy to imagine him flying into a rage, too. Yet he did not look out of place here, in spite of his ugliness.

"Everywhere the same," he growled, deep in his

throat, "police are police. If they had their way they would work only with a gun and a truncheon."

Grice ignored him.

"Ready, Rollison?"

"Not my lucky day," said Rollison, as if meekly. "Yes, I'll come clean." He winked at Zana, but was ignored, then found the Yard sergeant's arm closing on his. For a moment that made him angry; he was about to pull himself free, but checked the movement and forced a grin. There was plenty of time for clashing with the police later, if needs be.

Was this hostility because of Percival Harrison?

Another plain-clothes man was by the side of Grice's car. He opened the door. Rollison got in the back, and Grice followed, while the sergeant took the wheel. Half a dozen people stopped to stare. A beautifully dressed woman stepped out of a cream and grey Rolls-Bentley and swept towards the steps and the *salon*, as if no such thing as policemen existed.

"What's all this about?" Rollison asked Grice mildly.

"You blithering lunatic, why did you have to do that?" Grice exploded.

"What have I done?" inquired Rollison.

"For Pete's sake don't sit and bleat at me as if you were a lamb being led to the slaughter. You were at Hill Court, you nearly suffocated Harrison, you made fools of our chaps, and it's the last time we'll ever let it happen. You ought to be put in a cage or sent to a desert island. Now shut up and let me think."

Rollison murmured: "I hope it's all right for me to smoke."

"I hope the smoke chokes you."

"Yes, Bill," said Rollison, and sat back while the sergeant seemed to charm other traffic out of his path, and they headed swiftly for Scotland Yard. Grice was spotted by every constable on the way, and saluted a dozen times. He sat glowering. He was still glowering

at the Yard and on his way up to his office, but at least he sent the sergeant away so that he and Rollison were alone.

"Why did you do it?" he demanded. "Where are the things you took away? Don't tell me you haven't got them. I'll trace every movement you've made and find them if I have to put half the Force on to the job. It's bad enough dealing with you when you're sane, but when you lose what wits the good God gave you——"

"What *is* all this?" demanded Rollison, rather less meekly. "Who's going to call me liar if I say I don't know what you're talking about?"

But he knew.

"Mr. Percival James Harrison is going to call you a liar," Grice began, "and he's going to say that he got there when Beryl Ward was alive, that you shot her, that you were going to hang him behind that door and make it look like suicide. When the police arrived, he says, you dropped the idea. That's what's going to put you in the tightest corner you've ever been in."

Rollison felt himself go very cold.

"Any supporting evidence?" he inquired, politely.

"I'm a policeman, not counsel for the defence," Grice rasped. "There's just one hope of leaving you free to run around and make a thorough job of getting yourself in dock on a murder charge. That's if we find that Harrison has a record. We'll have some excuse for refusing to believe the word of an ex-convict. You'd better pray hard, and tell me where you put the stuff you took from the girl's flat."

Rollison said: "No comment."

"Don't be a ruddy fool!"

"Still no comment."

"I tell you that if I care to, I can hold you on a charge. You were seen breaking in, and when A.C. knows about this he'll change his tune."

"So he was friendly," murmured Rollison, and felt grateful for a crumb of comfort.

"He said I could give you your head," growled Grice. "We thought you still had control of it."

"Bill," said Rollison in a deceptively soft voice, "who is this Beryl Ward? What happened to her? Was she shot, knifed, strangled——"

"She was shot with the gun used to shoot at Zana this morning—the rifling on the bullets is identical. The gun was on the floor—wiped clean of prints. I've given Zana twenty of the most uncomfortable minutes he's ever had in his life; he knows a hell of a sight more than he pretends, too."

"Poor chap," said Rollison, with gentle asperity. "He asks the police for help, they tell him to go and hide his face, they tell him that his favourite model has walked out on him for no reason at all, they even tell him that if he wants to waste anyone's time he should waste mine. Then when they get proof that he was right and they were wrong, they bawl him out. No wonder he wonders if he's in another police state."

Rollison turned towards the door abruptly, and had actually reached it when Grice said:

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Home. I've had enough of this."

"You're not going home until you've told me where you put the stuff you stole from Beryl Ward's flat, and until we know whether Harrison's got a record or not."

"Never heard of your Harrison, but I'll bet he's got a record as long as your arm, and you know it," said Rollison icily. "You might spend some time looking for the man who was really at the girl's flat. I'm going home; I'll be there if you want me."

He touched the handle of the door.

He had no way of judging what Grice would do; no way of being sure that he would be allowed to leave the Yard. If he was held on a charge, if anyone else had seen him near those flats and could identify him——

The door opened, almost as if at a pre-arranged signal.

Standing outside was a uniformed policeman, carrying a peaked cap. Rollison recognised him on the instant as one of the men who had passed him in the police car, near Beryl Ward's flat.

8

IDENTIFICATION

"JUST a moment, Mr. Rollison," Grice said coldly, and turned to the uniformed man. "Come in, sergeant." The sergeant came in and closed the door, moving in such a way that he kept Rollison between himself and Grice; almost as if he expected Rollison to made a dash for the corridor. "You were at 19, Hill Court to-day, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you were there when the body of Miss Ward was found, and when the man Harrison was found in the bathroom."

"Suspended behind the bathroom door, sir."

"Yes. What took you to Hill Court?"

"I was called by the Divisional Station, sir, and instructed that there had been a report of a breaking and entering, so I proceeded to the vicinity at once."

"Did you recognise anyone near the flats while you were on your way?"

"Yes, sir."

"Who?"

"This gentleman, sir."

"Positive?"

"I've known Mr. Rollison by sight for about fifteen years, sir. I wouldn't be likely to make any mistake."

"Was he wearing the clothes that he's wearing now?"

"I couldn't swear to that, sir, but he was wearing a

suit of the same coloured material, and he was carrying a canvas and leather bag of the hold-all type."

"All right, sergeant, thank you."

The sergeant turned and opened the door. Rollison saw his powerful hand over the handle, dwarfing the key. The man would probably wait outside, on instructions already given. He went out and the door closed with a snap, while Rollison looked into Grice's bleak, hostile eyes—and Rollison gave a gentle, forbearing smile.

But he didn't feel like smiling.

Grice had shown him just how it would be. Question and answer in the magistrate's court, question and answer later, at the Old Bailey. He couldn't laugh off this kind of evidence. Grice knew how strong it was, and Grice hated the facts, but had to face and to deal with them.

"Now perhaps you see what a hopeless fool you've been," he said. "All we've got about what happened inside that flat is your word against Harrison's."

"Hard," said Rollison, "but inaccurate."

"Don't be funny."

"Not even funny peculiar. There's my evidence against Harrison's and against your sergeant's."

"If you think you can persuade anyone that you weren't near those flats a few minutes after it was entered by the police, you must be suffering from senile decay."

"That wasn't exactly what I was telling Jolly this morning," murmured Rollison. "Bill, I wasn't there. Someone must be wishful thinking or seeing double."

"Listen, Rolly," Grice said, and there was a change in his tone, almost one of pleading. "In a few minutes I shall know whether this Percival Harrison has a record. If he hasn't, his word is quite as good as yours in our eyes. In fact it's better, because there are plenty of instances where I can prove you've lied to us, even if it's been in what you'd call the interests of justice. But

get this perfectly clear. I'm going to have to charge you, if Harrison's record is good. I *must*. I ought to charge you even if he has a record—has he?" Grice flashed.

"I haven't seen him," Rollison murmured, "but wouldn't it show in his eyes?"

"And you sneer at us about wishful thinking," growled Grice. "God knows I don't want to hold you; I think you'll do as much good as anyone in finding out what's behind all this, but here's the evidence and——"

There was another tap at the door.

Rollison moved a little to one side, so that he was close to the wall, and no one could easily put him in the middle of three. He continued to smile as if quietly amused, but his heart was thumping uncomfortably fast. He was in serious trouble, and could see only one certain way out.

Certain?

The door opened. A plain-clothes man named Kennett came in and closed the door automatically. He was big and powerful; and he was frowning. Grice looked at him almost helplessly, but one glance at Kennett's face made his tidings pretty clear.

"Have we any record of this Percival Harrison?" Grice demanded.

"No, sir," said Kennett, "none at all."

Both he and Grice looked at Rollison as if they were seeing him for the first time. It was bitter-sweet, for Grice's expression told Rollison how deep was his personal regard and distress. But Grice was a policeman, policemen used evidence, and the evidence pointed only one way.

Rollison looked positively harassed.

"It seems as if I'm in trouble, doesn't it?" he said, and then moved forward—and appeared to trip over the edge of the carpet. He thrust out both hands to save himself, and pushed against Kennett—and sent

Kennett reeling towards Grice's desk. In a trice he was at the door, had the key out, and the door open.

". . . *dy fool!*" he heard Grice roar.

He slammed the door from the passage, and inserted the key; it turned as Kennett thudded against the door. No one was in the passage, but the thudding seemed to shake the walls. He ran towards the corner, turned round and saw several doors in a wide passage—here were two sergeants' rooms, a stenographers' room and a messengers'. The messengers' was his best bet. He tapped and opened the door and nipped inside. Two uniformed constables were sitting at a table, one of them smoking, the other studying racing form. They jumped up in alarm.

Rollison beamed.

"Mind if I use your telephone?" he asked politely, and strode to the table and lifted the telephone as he spoke.

"Go ahead, sir."

"Thanks," said Rollison, and began to dial the number of his flat. He could hear the thumping sounds not far away, but nothing seemed to alarm the two messengers, one of whom had folded his racing form sheet and thrust it into his jacket pocket. Then there were hurried footsteps outside, and someone called:

"What's that banging?"

"Hear that, George?" the racing form man said.

Other footsteps sounded, and Rollison heard them and two other things; the thumping of his heart and the *brrr-brrr* of the telephone ringing. Why hadn't Jolly answered at the first ting? He always did; he was the world's best telephone answerer, and there were two extensions in the flat. Jolly should be within hand's reach of one. *Why didn't he answer?* The ringing sound went on and on; now there were several people hurrying outside, and one of the messengers opened the door. Rollison turned his back to it.

Could Jolly have gone out? He'd been told to stay in except in emergency, and there could not have been a greater one than this.

Brrrr-brrrr!

One of the messengers went out, the other stood at the door. Men were talking excitedly.

Brrrr-eck!

"This is Mr. Richard Rollison's residence," said Jolly in his most soothing voice.

"Jolly, listen closely," Rollison said in a low-pitched voice, and gave his man scarcely a moment to grasp what he had said. "Ready? . . . I was at the *Blue Dog*, Ebbutt's place, between one-thirty and two-fifteen, got that? . . . Find Ebbutt and as many others as he can get who *saw* me there. . . . Understand, they're to be ready to swear that they saw me in or near the *Blue Dog*. Tell Ebbutt to fix everyone whom he knows is reliable. All right?"

"Perfectly understood, sir, and Mr. Ebbutt is here in person. I was at the door when you rang."

"Fine. He's to spread it round near the pub—if fifty people are ready to say I was there, so much the better."

Rollison rang off, and one of the messengers turned round from the door, his expression one of complete bewilderment.

So he hadn't heard anything that Rollison had said.

"Something's going on out there," he declared. "Everyone's rushing to the stairs and the lift."

"Why don't you go and see the fun?"

"Must always be one messenger in the office, sir; that's a rule. If we break it and Mr. Grice is about——"

"Bit of a terror, is he?"

"Strict, sir, but fair."

"Nice tribute for a tombstone," said Rollison, and dabbed his forehead, although it was not really hot. "I'm going to see him now, I'm on my way." He lit

a cigarette and went out. All the corridors were deserted. He strolled to Grice's room, and the door was ajar, a most unusual thing. He opened it on to an empty room, slipped inside, closed the door firmly, and then sat down in the easy chair, turned so that he faced the door. He drew gratefully at the cigarette and listened to his own breathing becoming more steady. He wasn't right out of the wood yet, but at least he could see the trees at the edges.

Two or three men hurried past, and then a telephone bell rang on Grice's desk.

Rollison let it ring.

It stopped, as someone else came hurrying. The door burst open, and Grice stepped in—and drew up so abruptly that he seemed to sway.

"Hallo, Bill," said Rollison, "looking for someone?"

"You—you *imbecile*!"

"Well, not all the time," said Rollison mildly. "I was sorely tempted to try to get away. I'd like to find Rose Mary and look after Zana. But I had second thoughts, and decided it would be better to appeal to sweet reason and the evidence than to have half the coppers of London looking for me."

Grice glowered: "I hope you get ten years." He went to the desk and picked up the telephone. "Tell Information Room to cancel that call for Rollison, stop the squad cars or call them back. . . ."

He rang off.

"I couldn't keep you out of the dock to-morrow morning if it was the thing I wanted more than anything in the world—and it isn't."

"Well, why don't you charge me and get it started?" suggested Rollison. "Because as soon as I'm charged I can send for my solicitor, and then——"

"There isn't a solicitor in London who can help you."

"Look here, Bill," said Rollison more sharply, and as if he was really annoyed, "I've had enough of this.

I lost my head for a moment, but in view of the way you'd been high-pressuring me, that isn't surprising. Instead of acting like some high and mighty chief copper, supposing you listen to facts. If I'd got away and you'd put that general call out for me, the Press would have had it in a few minutes. It would have been all over the headlines. That's chiefly why I came back: I don't want to make the Yard look small."

Grice began to stare, as if he wasn't quite so sure of himself.

"The Press would make a Roman holiday of you all right," he growled.

"They'd laugh you and the Yard to shame," Rollison declared, still sharply. "I wasn't at Hill Court. I was miles away, and can find a dozen eye-witnesses to prove it. Your man made a mistake. Harrison knows I'm working for Zana, and saw a chance to stop me."

Grice kept very still.

"What witnesses?"

"Plenty of them, and without records."

"If you're lying——"

"I'm not lying. I was at the *Blue Dog*. I wanted Ebbutt to do a job for me, and decided I'd better see him myself. I went straight to his place from here."

Grice relaxed, very slowly. He moved and sat on a corner of his desk. The bleakness of his gaze eased, and he actually began to smile, but there wasn't much humour in his expression. Rollison felt the easing of tension, and believed that he was really at the edge of the wood; but he couldn't be sure. One policeman's evidence was worth a great deal, and other policemen might have seen him.

Dare Grice put his men's evidence to the test?

"So you've fixed Ebbutt before you got here, have you?" Grice said, "and he and his pals are going to perjure themselves for you."

"They'll tell the simple truth."

"I see," said Grice, and nodded. "You're not only risking your own neck, but that of a lot of others. You sure they'll give this evidence?"

"Yes."

"Supposing I break them down."

"Be yourself, Bill. You couldn't force Ebbutt's men to deny that they'd seen me."

"No, I don't suppose I could," conceded Grice slowly; "they owe you too much, and Ebbutt will get hold of the men who owe you most, and who'll cheerfully take risks for you." He rubbed his pointed jaw, slowly and very thoughtfully. "All right," he went on at last, "if you can put a crowd of Ebbutt's men in the witness-box, I'll have to pass this one up. But be very careful from now on. Several policemen will hate your guts for this."

"Not if you handle it in your own inimitable way," said Rollison airily, and he stood up. "Appeal to their sense of justice and fair play, and above all their sense of humour. You might also tell them that I didn't kill Beryl Ward."

"Why did you go to see her?"

"I didn't go to see her," said Rollison gently. "Why don't you learn some new tricks, Bill? But if I had gone to see her I would have asked her why she fired at Zana this morning. Zana told me that he remembered where he'd seen her before—she was a temporary model for him some time ago. Another thing—find out if Percival James Harrison runs a black Ford Consul, because after shooting at Zana, Beryl Ward escaped in one, and a man drove her away. The day's full of urgent things to do without trying to put me in jug! May I go now, Bill?"

* * * *

Never had so many pairs of policemen's eyes been turned towards the Toff. Never had so many policemen,

seeing him, stopped to stare. Seldom had a group of twenty Flying Squad men, gathered near their cars in the courtyard, been so intent upon a man whom they were not hoping to arrest.

A policeman actually opened the door of a taxi.

"Nice of you," murmured Rollison politely. "Courtesy cops in more than name only." He beamed. "Thanks." He was driven out of the Yard on to the Embankment, and the sun was shining on the river, which looked blue, and on the Houses of Parliament, which looked like a coloured photograph. The cool, keen air was good to breathe. He told the driver to go slowly, feeling that he needed a little time to readjust himself, and wondering what Grice would say when he learned that the Toff had telephoned from the messengers' room.

Gradually all this faded.

Gradually he found himself thinking of the main problem—the finding of Rose Mary, discovering why Zana was being subjected to this vicious campaign, and worrying about Maude Dennison.

Hers was far too lovely a face to spoil. He must find some way to prevent her from taking the inevitable risks—of death, as well as of disfigurement.

For now he knew beyond all doubt that Mr. Smith was a killer.

"First job, see Maude," he said.

* * * *

At that moment Maude Dennison was being interviewed by Hugo Zana.

9

NEW MODEL

"YES, yes, I can see you have had some experience," Zana said to Maude, "but why not admit the truth? You are an amateur. Don't misunderstand me; some amateurs are very good. The trouble with many is that they will not work hard enough. They must work, work, work! The lazy ones who think that modelling for me is an easy way to money—woosh, out they go! Now, please, stand on the dais and put on this coat. Come, come, come, I haven't all day . . . ah! Lean back a little. Your left shoulder is dropping; up, please. Twist round a little from the waist. Thrust your bosom forward. So. Hmm. Hmm. *Hmmmmm*m. Relax, now, relax."

Maude stood at ease, watching the little man's ugly face and marvelling. There were few Hugo Zanas in the world, and most of his kind were excitable, eccentric and aggressive. He was no exception, except in one thing. He didn't smile, didn't try to impress her as a man; he looked at her as if she was something made out of plastic, which could be pushed this way and that.

"Charles!" he called suddenly. "Charles, come here!"

They were in a small *salon*, beautifully decorated in cream and gold, and with luxurious chairs in the corners, two long mirrors, a *salon* for a few selected clients only, women who spent great sums of money on their dress. Three doors led from it, and one opened and a biggish, chunky man stepped through. He had reddish hair which curled untidily, grey-green eyes which were very bright, and many more than his share of freckles. His wide mouth was turned up a little at the corners, as if

it would take a great deal to depress him. He wore a pair of grey flannel trousers and a short-sleeved powder-blue shirt, which was a crime with his colouring, and completely out of place in this room.

"Want me?" he asked. He glanced impersonally at Maude, and then at Zana. "I've lost a lot of time——"

"Then lose some more time if I want you to. I buy it, don't I?" Zana glowered. "What do you think, for the spring? That new Shetland pattern, for instance, and the tartans, the Irish tweeds."

The young man named Charles looked Maude up and down. He didn't smile. He appeared to be quite indifferent to her face, and in fact hardly looked at it, but he studied her figure with a detachment which was too obvious to be embarrassing.

Suddenly Maude felt that his opinion mattered, that Zana set great store by it.

"Could do," said Charles at last. "Can I see her in that scarlet and then the green and the ocean blue? Get the contrasts."

"Yes, all right. Mitzi!" Zana called, and the same door opened and a little grey-haired woman with a slightly humped back appeared. She had a kindly face and big rather prominent eyes. "Mitzi, take this girl into the dressing-room, help her with Flame, Spring, and the Ocean Blue. Adjust as you consider necessary." He nodded to Maude, who got off the dais and followed Mitzi and disappeared. But the dressing-room was just off the *salon*, and she heard Zana say:

"I want your honest opinion, Charles."

"You'll get it, as always."

"I am not so sure that it is always honest," Zana said tartly. His deep voice jarred, and yet it wasn't really unpleasant; more as if he hurt himself in the effort of speaking. "I do not want models who are only second-rate, just because there are difficulties."

"She's better than that. Didn't you see her walk?"

"Don't be a fool. Of course I *saw* her walk. Yes, she can move her body, but the bosom—a little too flat, don't you think?"

"Never heard of falsies?"

"You know I dislike using artificial aids to foundation," Zana said crossly. "Once that is necessary, one can never be sure that what dress will fit to-day will fit to-morrow. But I am not sure that it matters; she is not really *flat*, and a supporting bra—well, we can deal with that if we decide she will do. How quickly can you do some sketches?"

"When do you want them?"

"To-night."

"To-morrow night."

"When I was a young man and learning to paint I could have produced my work in half the time it takes you."

"Granted. That's why you're a dress designer."

Maude heard Zana catch his breath, and expected an outburst of bad temper; instead, Zana burst out laughing. For the first time the little grey-haired woman, who had been busily helping her to dress, handing her each garment, tucking here, pinning there, selecting shoes from a shelf at the foot of a large sliding-door wardrobe and generally hurrying, showed Maude that she had heard everything; and that she could guess what Maude was feeling.

"He and Charles," she said in broken English, "are ver' good friends."

"Who is Charles?"

"Oh, he is the artist and assistant designer, a clever one, Charles, but you know how it is." Mitzi shrugged. "He has not the feeling like Zana; he cannot close his eyes and see a woman without clothes, and imagine the *exact* clothes for her."

"Perhaps that's as well," Maude said.

"So," said Mitzi, and put in another pin and stood

back, like a little tame sparrow. "So. You will——"

"Mitzi, in there, are you going to be all day?" roared Zana.

"We are ready, coming," called Mitzi, and pushed open a curtain and stood aside. "Walk naturally. Do not swing your hips, do not pose at all," she whispered, and Maude obeyed, seeing the two men in a far corner of the *salon*, close together, staring at her. She went towards the middle of the room, then turned and walked round the walls, much more self-conscious than she usually was when modelling.

It really mattered whether these men thought she would "do."

"Thank you," Zana said after a long, cold appraisal. "Mitzi! Next, the green!"

"They are very pleased with you," Mitzi whispered when Maude was behind the curtain again. "I could tell by the way they looked at you."

"I hope you're right," said Maude fervently.

* * * *

After Maude had finished with the three suits, and was putting on her own clothes, Charles Russell stood in the doorway, and when she drew up her skirt rather hastily, he said:

"You'll have to get used to having me around, and I'll want to do some sketches of foundations, too. Do you blush easily?"

"Not in the way of business."

"Fine. Can you start at once?"

She caught her breath. "Yes."

"Now?"

"*Now?*"

"That's right, straight after a cup of tea. I'd like to do some sketches, and I must get the right stance and the right angles to do you full justice. I do all the finished drawings, Zana only sketches. He would like you to

have a month's trial, and if it's satisfactory, a permanent engagement. Is that all right?"

She thought of the condition she had imposed, and swiftly rejected it.

"Yes."

"That's fine," said Charles, casually. "By the way, I'm Charles Russell, odd-job man as well as artist. If you take my advice you'll leave terms to the old man himself, he's more likely to be generous if he's happy at the end of the month than he is if you pin him down to anything. If he isn't going to offer you a permanent job, he'll be generous because he's got about the softest heart this side of the American coastline. If you need a few pounds to keep you going——"

"No, I'm perfectly all right, thanks."

"That's good," said Charles Russell, and shifted his position, so that he leaned against the other side of the door. "One other thing."

"What's that?"

"I am to tell you that some peculiar things have been happening to Zana's models lately, and that Zana's had a lot of difficulty in getting girls to stay. This does not mean that as a result he has lowered his standards, but does mean that the job isn't as straightforward as it might sound. He believes that some of his models have been frightened away, and doesn't want you to be scared away, too."

"I'm not easily scared."

"No," said Charles, looking at her face and smiling faintly, "I don't think you are. You're the answer to our Hugo's prayer. He needed a little fillip this morning, everything's gone wrong since dawn. An ex-model shot at him, for one thing."

"*What?*"

"Not with a bow and arrow, either."

"Are you *really* trying to put me off?"

"No," said Russell, "that's the last thing I'd want,

but the great man is anxious that you should know about these things before you start."

"I see," said Maude, and added dryly: "Well, I know about them."

"Let's go and seal the bargain over a cup of tea," suggested Russell. "There's a little place round the corner where we usually go. By the way, I ought to make sure we have your proper name and address. Miss Maude Dennison, isn't it?"

"Lady Maude Dennison."

Russell shot her a quick look. "Really. Er—the Marigold Club, W.1."

"That's right."

"Records all in order," said Russell, and led the way out of the little *salon* to a wide landing, and then down the spacious stairs. As they reached the foot of them, the door opened and Richard Rollison came in.

Maude stood quite still, half expecting him to tell her sharply that she shouldn't have come on her own. Russell looked at Rollison with some interest, and there was a speculative "Haven't I seen you before?" expression in his eyes. Then suddenly Zana came out of a ground-floor room, moving swiftly, and whirling about when he saw the tableau.

"Hallo," said Rollison to Maude, and grinned. "Did you get your dress?"

"What's this?" demanded Zana. "You two know each other?"

"We're practically cousins."

"Rolly, I applied for this job myself, and I got it, and I intend to keep it. There's nothing you can do to stop me."

"Say, what is this?" inquired Russell.

"Who is to stop you from what?" demanded Zana. "I take on a new model, I warn her there are possibilities that someone will try to frighten her away. I do not expect you to start that, Rollison."

"I was going to try, but changed my mind," said Rollison.

"Good lord, of course—the *Toff*!" Russell exclaimed.

"Supposing we all get round a table and sort this out," suggested Rollison. "We could even do it over tea, they'd find us a small room round the corner, and I was always partial to their French pâtisserie."

"So," said Zana, shrugging. "If you really want it, but always tea, tea, tea! Cannot the English work without it?"

"I suppose when you were young they fed you on vodka," said Russell. "I'll put a jacket on, and follow you."

Rollison noticed the way in which Maude watched Russell as he went off, and could not remember her showing such marked interest in a young man before. Russell went up the stairs two at a time, and disappeared. Zana opened the door for Maude, with a little nod of his head which was the equivalent of a bow. All three reached the square, with its parked cars and its plane trees, the hurrying people, the brass plates on the doors of what had once been private houses, the show rooms for luxurious motor-cars at one corner. Just round that corner was a narrow street, and two doors along was *Anne's*, a little tea-shop which looked like a small private house. Only those who had inside information went here, for Anne was a pastry and cake cook in ten thousand, Even Jolly patronised her on those special occasions when the Toff had guests to tea.

There was a narrow entrance.

Anne herself, youthful middle-aged and very slim, came briskly to greet them, and her face lit up at the sight of Rollison.

"Hallo, Mr. Rollison, it's nice to see you again—oh, and Lady Maude. *And* Mr. Zana."

"And the last should be first," murmured Rollison. "Anne, is there a small room where we can have some

tea and talk? There'll be a fourth here in a few minutes."

"Yes, of course," said Anne, "there's plenty of room upstairs." She turned and hurried up, leading the way, on trim ankles and neat legs and sensible brown shoes. The staircase was of dark oak, the walls were panelled, but the little room overlooking the street was bright and charming, like a small Regency *salon*. A round table with five chairs about it, stood ready for tea.

"I'll send a girl in," Anne promised, and went off. Rollison moved to the door-window and glanced out, saw no one, and turned to face Zana, who wouldn't keep patient much longer, and would soon start clacking. So Rollison told him what he had planned with Maude, and how he had changed his mind, and how she had changed it back for him.

Zana looked at Maude with sharp, fresh interest.

"Knowing all that, you will still work for me?"

"Yes."

"That is excellent! You will not regret it, if——"

"If you haven't told him your condition," Rollison murmured, "don't you think——"

"Please, Rolly!"

"Oh, well," said Rollison, and as he did so, heard Anne speak to a man who was still coming up the stairs.

"They're in there, sir."

The man, presumably Russell, didn't answer. Maude turned to look at the door, which was ajar, and Zana was looking at Rollison, who certainly expected to see Russell. But he frowned, for the door opened and the sleeve of a dark grey jacket showed, and a small, sallow hand.

Not Russell's coat or hand.

"Yes, that's right," Anne said, "they're in there."

Rollison moved, swift as any man could. He thrust Zana to one side with the flat of his hand and sent him reeling; he leapt upon Maude, flung his arms round her, and carried her with him towards the wall, bumping her

head heavily. He heard her cry out, and turned to stare at the door.

It was open wide.

A man appeared, short and stocky, with a coat collar turned up, and with a small garden syringe in his hand. He pointed the syringe into the room and squeezed, and a liquid spattered out.

Some fell upon the table cloth, and burned small holes.

Some fell on the floor.

Some splashed the back of Rollison's head, and stung sharply, more fell on Zana's hands as he thrust them up to save his face.

10

STRONG MAN

ROLLISON saw the liquid as it came from the nozzle of the syringe, and he also saw Zana moving forward, although his hands were covering his face. The door, wide open for a moment, suddenly began to close, and the man with the syringe disappeared.

Zana leapt.

The door slammed.

Zana reached it before Rollison could free himself from Maude, who was clutching him round the waist, now, as if too frightened to show herself. He said: "It's all right, let me go," but she still hung on, and he had only himself to blame for the fierceness of his rush.

He freed himself.

Zana was already outside, and the door was wide open again. Footsteps thudded on the stairs, a woman exclaimed, and then screamed. There came a crash of cups and saucers, knives and plates, a shower of broken pieces clattered and rattled, falling down the stairs.

Rollison reached the landing.

Zana was already half-way down. A waitress in pale blue cowered against the wall, and the smashed crockery and a silver plated tray were on the ground at the foot of the stairs. The dark-haired man in a dark coat was near the door, but before he reached it, it opened, and Charles Russell appeared.

Russell gaped.

The running man leapt at him.

"Stop him!" roared Zana. "Stop him!"

Russell couldn't avoid doing so. He was in the open doorway, and there wasn't room for two men to pass, and so he blocked the other. Suddenly, he ducked; Rollison, half-way down the stairs, saw a few spots of liquid go over his head; that syringe wasn't empty yet.

Then Zana jumped at the assailant.

He clutched him by the shoulder, spun him round, and flung him against the wall. The strength in the little dress-designer was really something to see. His victim struck the wall with a thud, and began to slide down, but he didn't slide far. In that split second, Zana's fingers tightened about his neck, and stopped him from falling; there was no doubt at all that if he had his way, Zana would choke the life out of him. Zana stood holding the attacker at arm's length—those powerful, strong-man's arms—and the pale-faced victim was held tight against the wall, mouth open, tongue showing, eyes bulging.

"Hugo, let him go!" Russell commanded. "Let him go!"

Zana ignored him.

Russell pulled at his arms, but it was like plucking at steel girders. There was no shadow of doubt that death was in Zana's arms and hands and in his heart. He was squeezing so that the life would be choked out of his victim, and there was no other thought in his mind.

"Let him *go*!" Russell shouted.

Two waitresses were in the passage alongside the stairs, staring as if hypnotised. Several customers crowded the doorway of the tea rooms. Anne came hurrying from the kitchen. The only sounds were of Zana's heavy breathing, a kind of gasping from his victim, and Russell's insistent:

"Let him go!"

He struck Zana savagely on the side of the jaw, but Zana only shook his head, as if to dislodge a fly, and glared into the bulging eyes of the man he meant to kill.

Then Rollison reached him.

"That's enough, Zana," he said.

Zana took no notice at all.

"That's *enough*," Rollison repeated, and when Zana still ignored him, he stretched out his own right hand, gripped Zana's wrist, and twisted. He seemed to make little effort, but on the instant Zana started, then his body sagged and his grip on the man's throat relaxed. Rollison pushed; and Zana backed away, so that Russell could grab his arms. The man who had been pinned against the wall fell down, helplessly.

"What a horrible thing to see," a woman said in a choky voice. "Why doesn't someone fetch the police? Police!" she repeated, as if realising that was a brilliant idea, and then she shouted shrilly: "Police!"

"I've already dialled 999," said Anne, in her matter-of-fact voice, "the police will be here any moment."

There was a pause, before a woman asked fearfully:

"Will he die?"

"He won't die," Rollison declared, and beckoned Russell, who let Zana go and came forward. "Get him back to the *salon*. Keep him there, understand? If he doesn't stay, the police will be after him, and he might find himself in a really bad spot. Understand?"

"Trust me."

"I hope I can," Rollison said.

Russell stared, as if the fervour of the remark startled

him. His grey-green eyes looked very open and honest, and there was a puzzled look in them. Then he grinned, took Zana by the arm, and turned towards the door.

"You're not going to let him *go!*" a woman cried.

"He won't go far," said Rollison. "Anne, get some cold water, please, and sponge Lady Maude's hands and face if she was splashed. We'll have to cleanse this chap's too." He went down on his knees beside the man who had sprayed the acid into the little room, a man whose own hands were burnt and blistered by the filthy stuff, whose neck was swollen and red, whose mouth was slack and who looked as if he might be dead. "Lukewarm water, please, then clear that room," he said. "We'll save him if we get busy."

He dragged the man into the tea room, and began artificial respiration, and as he did so he heard a car draw up outside, doors slam, the footsteps of several men. Here were the police, and they couldn't have come much more quickly. They could take over, and he wouldn't mind that. If they saved this man's life they would be able to question him, and between him and Harrison there should be quite a story to tell.

But if the man died. . . .

He wouldn't be able to talk, but that wasn't all, and it hardly seemed to matter. If he died, then Zana had killed him, and although that might be justifiable homicide, it would have to be proved. The police would probably be compelled to hold the designer for a long, long time.

That could ruin him.

And someone meant to——

A policeman came in.

"Take over from me, will you?" Rollison said, but didn't stop the rhythm of his movements, as he leaned his weight on the man's back. "Thanks." A policeman knelt beside him, and then took over, with hardly a break in the rhythm. "Fine," said Rollison, thankfully, and straightened up, and stretched.

He looked into the eyes of the uniformed sergeant who had seen him near Hill Court.

They were hostile eyes.

"Perhaps you're not here this time, either," the sergeant said, with an under-current of resentment in his voice. "The sooner you're cooling your heels the sooner this trouble will be over. What happened?"

"I don't know why you're talking to Mr. Rollison like that," said Anne of the teashop. "He saved this man's life. You should be thanking him, not flaring up at him. Mr. Rollison, please let me bathe those spots on your hand."

She did so, cooling the tiny, burning spots.

"It'll work out," said Rollison, and smiled his thanks. "In the sergeant's place, I'd be mad at me too. Come upstairs with me, will you?" He led the way, and the sergeant and another policeman followed. Rollison turned into the little private *salon*. There was the cloth, with large brown holes burnt in it, the smallest the size of a shilling, the largest the size of half a crown. There were brown holes in the carpet, too, and some blistered marks on the pretty, flowered wall-paper. There was also a faint smell, one that vitriol might make. "Here's where it happened," Rollison went on. "Zana and Lady Maude and I were in here, waiting for our tea, and. . . ."

He told the story in precise detail.

The hostility faded from the sergeant's eyes while he listened, and while the other detective made notes. All the time, Maude sat in a chair near the window, looking very pale. Her eyes were too bright, and now and again she shivered. Rollison took no particular notice of her, but wondered if her nerves would stand the strain for long.

He hoped that they would not.

"And that's the lot," he said at last.

"Thank you, sir," said the sergeant. "Now I shall

want to see Mr. Zana. And telephone Mr. Grice. Will you be here?"

"For two minutes or so, but I'll be at Hugo Zana's for as long as you want me to be," said Rollison. "Come on, Maude." He stretched out his hands and she took them and stood up, relying a great deal on his support. "Let me know as soon as you can whether that chap dies or not, won't you?"

"We will," promised the sergeant.

The third policeman was still working on the unconscious man as Rollison and Maude passed, and there was no way of telling whether he would live or die.

As Rollison and the girl reached the corner, a car drew up, stopping very quickly.

Grice was in it.

* * * * *

"All right," said Grice, half an hour later. "I've got the story clear, and there seems to be plenty of evidence. If the man should die, Mr. Zana, it will be necessary to charge you with causing his death. You understand that, don't you?"

Zana said abruptly: "Yes, I do."

"I fully realise that you had extreme provocation, judging from the statements made, but that is no excuse for taking the law into your own hands," Grice went on, with cold formality. "The police are here to enforce the law. In spite of your opinion, the police have their uses. Have you ever seen the man before?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I do not lie, to the police or to anyone else," said Zana angrily.

"I hope that's true. Had you seen him before, Mr. Rollison?"

"No."

"Lady Maude?"

"No."

"Mr. Russell?"

"As a matter of fact I have seen him nearby several times lately," Russell said, bringing welcome relief to the tension. "He's been outside in the square—I thought he was passing betting slips! He's been about for several days."

"Have you seen him talk to anyone else?"

"One or two people have spoken to him, but I couldn't tell you what they looked like," said Russell, smoothing down his unruly ginger hair. "If I'd known what he was after——" he broke off, glanced at Maude, and then went on in a harder voice: "I suppose he was standing there ready to spray that foul stuff on anyone he decided shouldn't be allowed to work for Zana."

Now everyone looked at Maude, who was sitting very still in an armchair in the corner.

II

UNLOCKED DOOR

MAUDE had not appeared to be listening to the conversation, but was obviously aware of the way all of them looked at her, and she eased herself back in her chair. She had a little colour now, and clearly had much better control over herself.

"Rolly, give me a cigarette, will you?" she asked.

Rollison was at her side in a moment, and no one spoke as he handed her his case and flicked flame to his lighter. She drew deeply, and let the smoke trickle out between her lips at one corner.

"I don't pretend that I enjoyed that very much," she said, "but I've always wanted to model for Hugo Zana."

"My dear good woman——" Zana jumped up.

"And I've always admired Rose Mary," Maude went on quietly. "I hope I can help her, too."

"This kind of thing might happen again and again," Russell said, harshly.

"I have Rolly to protect me!" That was only half joking.

"He won't always be at hand," said Russell, and swung round towards Zana. "Hugo, you can't let her work for you after this. It would be next door to murder."

Grice sat and watched the scene; Rollison stood and watched; and Zana and his assistant stared at each other as if oblivious of the others. Zana's big mouth was working in a way which suggested that he was fighting back a spate of furious temper.

Did he suffer from paroxysms of fury?

"I know whom I want to work for me," Zana said, deep in his throat, "and I want those sketches to-night, by seven o'clock. You haven't much time."

"It's crazy!"

"Very well, I am crazy."

"If you take risks with Lady Maude——"

"What are you trying to do?" demanded Zana, almost shrill, "teach me my own business? She wishes to work for me, so she works for me. Anyone who doesn't wish to work for me knows where he can go. There is only one Hugo Zana, there are dozens of good artists."

"Why, you conceited lunatic——" began Russell, jumping to his feet. "Go and find one half as good as me if you can. I'm finished with the damned job." He glowered at Zana, his face now redder than his hair, and the freckles showing clearly; here was the temper at which his colouring had hinted. His glittering eyes looked more green than grey. "And if you've any sense, you'll get out of this while the going's good, what sense is there in you getting yourself hurt?"

"You're very sure that Lady Maude will get hurt, aren't you?" asked Grice.

Russell swung round on him.

"What more evidence do you want? To find her with her throat cut or her face burned off?" He flung himself out of the room, and clumped up the stairs; and soon they heard thudding sounds, as if he was kicking at everything that got in his way.

Zana looked across at Maude, whose smile was now set and strained. What would Zana do, Rollison wondered.

He should have expected the sudden, broad grin, which made Zana look so much like a clown.

"He will be back in time to get the sketches done," he asserted confidently. "Come with me, please, I want to show you the dresses which you will wear for the sketches, and also—there is something I would like to try with you. Those shoulders, they are very good, I have an idea that it would be possible to drape a coat from the back in such a way—yes, I think so. Yes. Come!" He jumped up. "We will go and see Mitzi." He moved towards Maude, took her arm and then swung round towards Grice. "The police do not object if I work?"

"The police don't object," said Grice, "but you won't work for long if that man dies."

"Then we must hurry!" Zana cried, and almost hustled Maude out of the room.

Grice watched them go, then ran his thumb and forefinger over his chin; it rasped over stubble which looked very grey against his sallow skin. He smiled wryly as he heard the couple hurrying up the stairs.

"Think he's right about Russell?"

"Probably. Bill, will you check Russell's past and present as closely as you will Percival Harrison's?"

"Why?"

"It may be just because he's a human being, but he was very anxious for Lady Maude not to work for Zana,

wasn't he? And he was the only person who knew we were going to Anne's for tea. He had time to telephone for the acid thrower, even time to have a word with the chap in the street. That's a thing to check, too."

"Any other reasons for suspecting him?"

"I don't even suspect him, I'd just like to make sure that he isn't involved with our Mr. Smith," said Rollison. "There's another thing, Bill. I don't like to think that Maude is the only one working for Zana."

"She won't be," Grice said grimly. "I'll arrange for a couple of our most attractive policewomen to join Zana soon; it may take a bit of arranging, though."

"If he's under arrest it won't be necessary," Rollison observed.

"He won't be. The acid-thrower's come round."

"Small mercies," Rollison said, thankfully. "Anything new, Bill? From the agents who won't send girls to Zana, for instance."

"Yes and no," Grice said, slowly.

"Can you tell me?"

"Yes. Two say that Zana's reputation is now so bad that they won't take risks. One admits he was frightened —by threats of physical violence. Undoubtedly someone is out to ruin Zana."

"Hm, yes," said Rollison, and forbore to point out that the police could have acted sooner. Perhaps they couldn't be blamed for their caution, and certainly they were trying to make up for lost time. "Have you heard from any of the models themselves?"

"Two of those who left the country lived alone, no one's heard from them since they went. The families of the other two—one's gone to Milan, one to Buenos Aires —have had cables."

"That all?"

"Yes."

"I'd give a lot to talk to one of those models," Rollison said. "Anything more?"

Grice rubbed his chin again.

"No, but we've plenty. English people with the artistic temperament are bad enough, but the continentals——" he shrugged. "Zana sees himself as a kind of genius when he's working, I'm told, refuses to have anyone near him except his faithful old Mitzi, goes into a kind of trance, and then comes out of it as if he was inspired. Can't get any sense out of him."

"Been studying the great man, have you?" murmured Rollison.

"You may find it hard to believe but we like to know the people we're dealing with," Grice said, "and we're badly worried about this." He moved towards the street door as he went on, and it opened on to the bright, sunlit square. He glanced at his watch. "It's nearly half past four, at least I've got to admit that a lot of things have happened since Zana came to see you."

"Including a visit to the East End," said Rollison solemnly. "I trust you've checked that."

"Ebbutt's boys would swear that you were in Australia if you asked them to, they're that devoted to you at the moment," Grice said. "But it might not last."

"Don't be too hopeful. Any news of Rose Mary Bell?"

"Nothing I haven't told you about."

"I think I'd like to go and look at her flat," Rollison said, hopefully.

"If you force entry I'll put you inside, no matter what alibi you have."

"I never enter a lady's apartment without being invited," Rollison said solemnly. "Bill."

"Yes?"

"What's the name of that sergeant who didn't see me near Hill Court?"

"Maidment."

"Good chap?"

"Coming on to the plain-clothes branch in a few

weeks time, he's one of the better ones. Look out for him."

"I will. Nice fellow."

"If you ever get him to think kindly about you, I'll believe in miracles again," Grice said. He glanced towards the corner as an ambulance appeared, almost certainly carrying the man whom Zana had choked. Two policemen came round the corner, including Maidment. "Rolly," Grice went on, "if I didn't know before, I know how ugly this is now. You may be surprised to hear me say it, but you're not a bad-looking chap yourself."

Rollison said blankly: "Handsome is as handsome does, Bill. Thanks."

Grice went off, paused to speak to the two policemen, and then went round the corner again. The policemen strolled towards the *salon*, and Maidment glanced at Rollison but didn't nod or smile. Obviously these two were going to watch the *salon*, which wasn't likely to be left unguarded until this affair was over.

It wasn't likely that Maude would be allowed to go anywhere by herself, either.

Rollison hadn't seen Russell come out, and wondered if there was a back way, and whether Zana knew the artist well enough to be right about him recovering from the outburst of temper. Had that just been the Irish in Russell? Or was it possible that he was among those people who were anxious that no models should work for Zana?

Rollison went to his car, which was now parked on the other side of the square, scarlet and dazzling in the afternoon sun; the black and blue and grey cars beside it showed up drab and uninteresting. He hadn't locked the door when he had left it, and he opened it quickly and was about to get in when he noticed that the bonnet wasn't properly closed. He stared at that, no longer absently.

When it wasn't fully closed, it rattled; and it hadn't

rattled on the way here. So, someone had released it, from inside the car.

Why?

He studied the green upholstery, looked along the dashboard, saw nothing unusual, and then put his keys away and cautiously opened the door.

Nothing happened.

"Odd," he said, very softly. "Very odd."

He studied the floor and the pedals; they all seemed normal enough. He looked at the handle which controlled the bonnet, and saw several smeary marks on it; they might be his own fingerprints, but he doubted whether his fingers would leave such marks. He pulled it, still very gently, and nothing happened—except that a young lad stopped on the pavement in front of the car, staring as if he could not believe his eyes.

Rollison winked at him, and went forward to lift the bonnet. He was even more cautious than before. The bonnet went up without trouble; it did not need fastening, but would hang in mid-air until he slammed it down. The lad drew nearer. Rollison studied the beautifully finished engine and the whole works, familiar with every item except one. Carburettor, engine casing, self-starter wire, the electric wiring, the fan and fan belt, the various component parts were almost as familiar to him as his own hand, but he had never before seen the small metal container, rather like a fat aluminium cigarette, which was tied to the self-starter arm.

"Well, well," he said, and repeated: "Well!"

The lad was almost breathing down his neck.

"Stand back a bit, will you?" said Rollison, and turned to look into the eager young eyes.

"Sir, you *are* Mr. Rollison, aren't you? I mean, you *are* the Toff. I'm sure I've——"

"That's what I've been called," agreed Rollison, and smiled broadly and rested a hand on the young man's shoulder. "Do something for me?"

"Rath—*er*!"

"Thanks. Go round the square until you reach Zana's *salon*. If you don't know it, there's a brass plate on the door. Walking about outside you'll see two policemen, one of them a sergeant wearing a peaked cap, not a helmet. He's Sergeant Maidment. Ask him if he can come and see me for a moment, will you?"

"Right away, sir," the lad said eagerly, and could hardly get the words out. "Are you—are you on a job, sir?"

"A little one."

"And I've *helped*," the lad breathed, and turned and scurried off, as if he couldn't perform his errand quickly enough. Rollison turned away from him, and studied the little metal cylinder, having no doubt that it contained nitro-glycerine or some other high explosive that would go off the moment the engine started, perhaps as the self-starter was pushed. Everything in the book was used, every known trick; and if the man who had done this had closed the bonnet properly it would have been successful.

It wouldn't be now.

Rollison felt great tension building up inside him. There were a dozen things he wanted to do at once, including a visit to Rose Mary's flat, but he wasn't sure that he ought to go there first. Ebbutt's men would have been out with their inquiries for some time, there might be some reports. It had become desperately urgent to see the case through quickly, because the pressure against Zana was being stepped up.

Rollison had to face that.

He hadn't time to worry about why it was happening, except that the "why" would surely help him find Smith. Smith had become an ogre; a killer above all killers, determined at all costs to put Hugo Zana out of business.

Could that be the only reason?

Rollison set his mind to work against time, going over everything that had happened and everything that he

had been told. The bonnet was still up, to passers-by it must look as if there was engine trouble, and he had sent for a mechanic. He glanced along the street and saw the boy coming, taking very long strides to keep up with Sergeant Maidment, who was no more than fifty yards or so away.

Then Rollison saw the man on the motor cycle.

The motor cyclist had entered the square a minute before, and had already been round it twice; now he was heading this way again, and was very close to the bonnets of the parked cars; it was almost as if he was looking for one of them.

He carried a hammer in his right hand.

Why should a motor cyclist——

In a surge of horror, Rollison realised why, realised that this was one of Mr. Smith's men, that as he passed the car with the bonnet wide open, he would fling the hammer in. The thud and the vibration would set off that deadly little tube, blowing the car, the Toff and everything nearby to little pieces.

The motor cyclist, engine roaring, tossed the hammer.

12

CATCH

THE hammer was high in the air.

Rollison could fling himself to the ground and with a chance of surviving, the worst of the blast and the wrecked engine would hurtle over him. He could try to close the bonnet, but there was no time to be gentle, and vibration might cause the explosion. If the hammer fell and the car blew up, then Maidment, the boy, and a dozen passers-by would suffer, some would die and some be maimed and some disfigured for life.

There was no time to think, yet these thoughts flashed through Rollison's mind.

He acted, swift as the thoughts themselves.

He stretched upwards, clutching desperately for the head of the hammer; if he could catch it and fling it away he might yet save them all.

If he missed——

He leaned over the yawning engine, arm stretched upwards. Within a foot of him was the dangling cyclinder, swaying gently as the car shook; remember, if he jolted it the cylinder would bump against metal and everything would blow up.

Rollison heard the sharp beat of the motor-cycle engine and thought that he heard running footsteps, but all he could see was the hammer, dark against the light-green foliage of the plane trees. The hammer was falling plumb into the engine. If he grabbed and missed, or if he caught and dropped it, that would be the end.

The head of the hammer was dull and grey; he could see where it had been used to strike cold chisels. He knew that it's awkward balance made it hard to catch; but the cold steel struck the inside of his fingers, and he caught it and held on. But as he caught it he bumped against the car. His own terror was so great that he felt sure that he had wasted all this effort. Out of the corner of his eye he could see the metal swaying, and if nitro-glycerine was inside, that was the last thing he was likely to see in this world.

He heard it touch, gently.

He flung the hammer into the road.

Nothing else happened in the awful split second which followed. The cylinder did not blow up. It was swaying very gently, but no longer touching any metal part.

Then, abruptly, the other things about him became vivid again.

"What's happening, Mr. Rollison?" That was Sergeant Maidment, urgently. "What is it?"

"What's happening there?" a man called out.

"Sergeant," Rollison said, and gulped, and saw that everyone was looking at him curiously. He did not know that he had lost all his colour and was deathly white; or that his forehead was beaded with shiny sweat. "Try and catch—that motor-cyclist."

"What——"

"Hurry," Rollison made himself say.

Other men had come, and a car drew up, with two uniformed policemen in front. Maidment called out to them, and they moved off, hurrying, while Rollison took out his handkerchief and dabbed his forehead, and leaned against the car. His legs seemed likely to double up beneath him. The crowd was much thicker now, and the boy was in front, with Maidment and a second policemen close to Rollison.

"I must ask you——" Maidment began.

"Yes," said Rollison. "Sorry. Move the crowd back, will you? There could be trouble."

Maidment hesitated, then called out to a uniformed sergeant, who began to move the crowd away; half a dozen policemen helped him in their phlegmatic way.

"Don't carry a whisky flask, do you?" Rollison asked. "Pity." He took out cigarettes and lit one, and shivered. "Sorry. You have now seen everything—a man in fear of death." He said that so quietly that only Maidment could hear, and went on in the same low-pitched voice: "Some joker tied what I think was a tube of nitro-glycerine on to the starting arm of the car. It should have gone off when I pressed the self-starter, but I spotted something wrong, so was careful, and——"

Maidment was peering into the bowels of the Bristol.

"See it?" asked Rollison.

"Yes," Maidment said, and moistened his lips. "Yes, I see it." His voice was as low-pitched and dry as Rollison's now. "If that had gone up, you——" he broke off, and turned to look at Rollison, with a very

different expression in his eyes from any there had been before. Unbelieving? "*Sure* it's nitro, sir?"

"No."

"Doesn't make much difference, you thought it was," said Maidment. "I don't think it ought to be touched, except by someone who knows more about the stuff than I do. I saw that motor cyclist throw something at you, d'you think he meant to start the concussion?"

"It looked like it."

"Lot of people about here who ought to thank their lucky stars that you kept your head." said Maidment, and stared at the cylinder as if wondering whether the vibration caused by passing traffic would set it off. "I'll send orders for a message to Mr. Grice, sir." He talked to the other constable, while the distant crowd grew restless. "No need for you to stay, sir, if you'd care to go and sit down somewhere, that's all right. We'll need the car for a bit, for fingerprints and that kind of thing."

"Yes," said Rollison. "Thanks." He felt much better and straightened up. "I'll stay until you've others here to help make sure no one gets too curious, or tries to rock the boat. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. That's the motto of Mr. Smith."

Maidment was quiet. Uniformed men came hurrying towards them, and two were at the back of the restless crowd, the familiar: "Keep away and move on, please, move along," came clearly.

Those at the back obeyed immediately.

The lad stared at Rollison, adoringly.

Maidment cleared his throat.

"What kind of devil are we up against, sir?"

"The worst kind."

"I'm just beginning to realise what could have happened if you——" began Maidment, and went a bright, bright red. "First the incident at the tea-shop, and now this——"

"My busy day," said Rollison. "It's a good thing

I can't be in two places at once. Now your chaps are here in strength, I'll move on, I think. I'll be at my flat for the next couple of hours, anyhow."

"I'll tell Mr. Grice, sir."

"Good," said Rollison. "Thanks."

He moved towards the thinning crowd and saw the boy, and recognised his expression as hero worship, although the lad did not know exactly what had happened. He put a hand on the narrow shoulder, and they made their way towards a corner. Rollison felt completely relaxed and still a little weak at the knees; he would not want to hurry for a while. He lit another cigarette, sensing the way the lad was staring at him, but finding it difficult to speak. Suddenly he said:

"Do you work near here?"

"Yes, sir, just across the square."

"Busy?"

"Well, it's my tea break, really. I'd just come out for a spot of air. Crumbs, I'll be late if I don't hurry. I'll catch it! You—you wouldn't mind telling me what happened back at the car, sir, would you?"

"I will, later; I mustn't now. Give me your address, will you? And also your name."

"I'm Michael Abbott, sir, and—well, I've an envelope with my address on it. Will that do?" He drew out several dog-eared letters, obviously precious possessions, and carefully extracted a letter from one. "Will that do, sir?"

"Just right, thanks," said Rollison. "Don't be surprised if it's a few days before you hear from me. I've a job on at the moment. And, yes, Michael, you helped very much."

"I'll gladly help any time you like," Michael breathed. He hesitated, then made himself move away. "I must hurry, or the boss will give it me good and hard. Goodbye, sir."

He held out his hand.

Rollison gripped it. . . .

Rollison reached the corner, aware that several people were following him, and feeling much better since the talk with the lad. He glanced along a street leading into the square, and there were two taxis coming along, but each was full. A third came up, empty.

"Ah," said Rollison. "Fine. Thanks. Twenty-two Gresham Terrace, please."

He sat back, wryly amused because he had to go round the square, where the police were trying to keep hundreds of people at a safe distance. Then Rollison was sent by one-way streets to Gresham Terrace in thrice the time it would have taken him to walk. He paid his half-crown plus gladly, and stood outside Number 22, looking up at the window, wondering if Jolly had seen him.

He did everything with great deliberation and extreme care.

First, he unlocked the street door and pushed it open slowly, then looked behind it to make sure that nothing was hanging there, inspected the stairs as he went up to make sure there wasn't another trip string, this time with a high explosive attached.

All seemed well.

The front door of his own flat opened as he reached the landing, and he stopped abruptly, half afraid of more trouble. But this was Jolly, elderly, sedate and upright, standing aside and waiting for him to enter, and showing obvious solicitude. Jolly would not need telling that the past hour or so had been strenuous in the extreme.

Rollison went in.

"Are we alone, Jolly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank the Lord for small mercies. Have you ever heard of tea laced with brandy?"

"The kettle's on, sir, and it won't take a moment to brew the tea," said Jolly. He led the way into the big room, guided Rollison towards a large arm-chair and hovered, as if to make sure that Rollison sat down before

he went to the desk. Any other time the ruse would have failed. Now, Rollison was in the mood for a little fussing.

"I won't be two minutes, sir," Jolly promised.

As he went out, Rollison stood up unhurriedly, and went to the desk. There were seven messages, all received by telephone, and all written down in Jolly's meticulous hand-writing. Each was from one of Ebbutt's men, with reports about the people they had already visited. There were the lists which Zana had sent, too. Two of the reports were of especial interest, for each said practically the same as Grice had said—about a girl meeting with an accident, another being attacked with vitriol; this girl had gone to Canada.

One said that a girl had been scared by dogs; that was new.

"So it all seems to add up," Rollison said, and went back to the chair, leaning back and closing his eyes the moment Jolly arrived, so that it looked as if he had been resting all the time. There was a chink of cups, and he could picture the broken crockery at the bottom of the stairs at Anne's tea *salon*. When he closed his eyes he could see a lot of things.

He heard Jolly go to the cocktail cabinet to get the brandy, heard the gurgle of tea being poured out, the sharp sound of a cork coming out of a bottle. Jolly did everything very quietly, even to saying:

"Your tea, sir."

"Yes," said Rollison, and sat up, pretending to yawn. "If you know of a better treatment than forty winks, tell me about it."

"Eighty winks, sir."

Rollison started, and stared.

"*You*, too," he sighed. "Someone has been getting at you. Thanks." The bouquet of the brandy was a tonic in itself. He sipped, then drank, and Jolly came back to pour out a second cup. The telephone was blessedly quiet, everything was blessedly quiet, and after

the second cup and a cigarette, Rollison felt as if he could catch another hammer.

"Let me see any messages, Jolly."

"Yes, sir," said Jolly, "although most of them are negative. There hasn't been much time yet, of course, and most of the reports are at second-hand, but there are one or two interesting factors." He reported what Rollison already knew, and went on: "As far as I have yet been able to find out, however, all of them are perfectly well and working—some as models, some in different occupations. There is as yet no report that any of them has explained why she left Zana—except to give the reasons already quoted, sir—but the most significant message is one that isn't written down. I took it just before your taxi pulled up outside."

"Ah! What was it?" Rollison sat up.

"One of Ebbutt's men, named Higgs, has done a little art school modelling himself, sir, and he knows some of the people in the sphere. He has met Rose Mary Bell on several occasions, and knows some of her friends. He appears to have followed a line of inquiry which promises results. He thinks he's traced the young woman, sir."

Jolly stopped.

Rollison stared, as if doubting the evidence of his ears.

"Say that again."

"He appears to be quite serious, sir, and feels confident that he knows where the young woman is."

"Next time, break news like this gently," begged Rollison. "Did you think to get the address?"

"Oh, yes," said Jolly, "and as I distrust my memory on such details, I wrote it down, sir. Shall I get it?"

"Please."

Jolly turned towards the desk, and as he did so the telephone bell rang. That broke the period of blessed quiet, and it did more, for it made Rollison want to do two things at once.

Jolly said quickly:

"I'll answer, sir," and lifted the telephone, but Rollison stood up and stepped to the desk, while Jolly spoke.

Could Higgs know where to find Rose Mary?

13

CAUSE FOR SUSPICION

"THIS is Mr. Richard Rollison's residence," announced Jolly with a formality which few sensations could even shake.

Rollison looked for the name and address which he had missed before, and could not see it.

"I'm not sure whether Mr. Rollison is in. If you will hold on, I will find out," said Jolly, and hugged the telephone to his chest as Rollison glanced up, still unable to find what he was looking for.

"Who is it?"

"Mr. Charles Russell, sir."

"I'm in," said Rollison. "Ask him to hold on." He made a final inspection of the desk, but saw no sign of the vital slip of paper. Jolly would have it; the brief delay didn't really matter, yet for those few seconds finding out where Rose Mary Bell might be was the most important thing in the world. "All right," he said at last, and took the telephone. "Yes, Mr. Russell?"

"Is that Richard Rollison?"

"Yes."

"Listen, Rollison," said Russell abruptly. "I don't know much about you or how good you are, but I'm damned worried about the way this affair is going."

"That doesn't surprise me." Rollison fought back a temptation to be brusque. "A lot of people are worried."

"I'm not sure that they're worried enough," Russell said. "I was all for calling you in, as the police didn't seem anxious to help, but I didn't think it would mean taking risks with—well, anyone like Lady Maude."

"Friend of yours?" inquired Rollison.

"I don't have to be a friend to like the way she looks and the way she walks," Russell said roundly. "She's supposed to be a friend of yours, but look what you're doing to her. She'll throw this job up if you say the word, and you ought to say the word."

"You don't know Maude very well," said Rollison mildly. "But I understood that you'd approved of her being employed by Zana, and that he consulted you first. Why the sudden change of front?"

Russell didn't answer.

"No reason at all?" suggested Rollison.

"I've a reason, and a damned good one, too," said Russell abruptly. "Now that I know she's a friend of yours, and that you're working for us on this ruddy business, the devils will make a dead set at her. Good God! haven't you seen enough already? They might have scarred her for life at that teashop, or else have blinded her. How can you justify taking risks like that?"

"I don't think I should worry too much about Maude," advised Rollison, and was less tempted to be impatient. "She also knows what she's doing, and she'll have protection."

"Protection," echoed Russell bitterly. "I suppose you mean those flat-headed flatfoots."

Rollison found himself chuckling.

"If you mean the police——"

"I mean the police. What good are they going to be? Zana asked them to find out what's going on, and all they did was to put him off, and say they'd look into it. They haven't looked far! Then there's what happened this afternoon. The police tagged along when all the danger was over. Why, I was there before they were."

"Yes, you were," said Rollison, "but even the police can't be expected to guess when trouble's coming. What did you really ring up about?"

"I want you to persuade Lady Maude to throw her hand in."

"Even if I tried it couldn't be done, and I don't feel disposed to try."

"Then you're either a lunatic or a knave," Russell said abruptly, and banged his receiver down.

Rollison replaced his slowly and very thoughtfully. For the moment, he had forgotten the slip of paper and that name and address of the place where Rose Mary Bell might be. Facts were facts. Russell was a good-looking, hot-headed individual, working very close to Zana. Russell had stayed behind at the *salon*, and could have telephoned or talked to the man who had attacked them at Anne's. Now he was doing his damndest to make Maude do what all of Zana's models had done.

"Cause for suspicion," Rollison said, and noticed that Jolly was bending down by the front of the desk; suddenly Jolly went down on his knees. "Can't you find it either?" he asked. "Don't say we've had visitors and that no one saw them call."

"I distinctly remember——" began Jolly, and then he stood up and snapped his fingers with vexation. "What a fool I am! I remember taking it into the kitchen with me, I'll go and get it, sir. I do hope you will relax for an hour or two, and not go out again yet." He stood up and, obviously annoyed with himself, went into the kitchen, carrying the tea tray.

Rollison lit a cigarette and pondered on the causes for suspecting Charles Russell.

He went to the telephone and dialled Ebbutt's number, and was answered promptly by Ebbutt himself, in a voice which was like no other voice in the whole of London.

"Oh, 'allo, Mr. Ar! Everything being done to your satisfaction?"

"Very smoothly so far, Bill," said Rollison. "Tiny Joe isn't doing anything on the job, is he?"

"Didn't look like a job for Tiny Joe," said Ebbutt, "but if you think——"

"It wasn't, but one's turned up," said Rollison. "Could you send him over?"

"Sure, right away, he's punching the ball at the moment. Tailing job?"

"Yes."

"Try to make sure 'e don't 'urt 'is 'ands, will you," pleaded Ebbutt. "Quite the most promising boy I've had for a long time, got a bit of the old devil in him, haven't seen a n'arder punch from a little 'un since the palmy days of Jimmy Wilde. Cor, there was a fighter for you, when Jimmy——"

"Ask Tiny Joe to come in the back way," interrupted Rollison, "and tell him he's to keep out of trouble on the way."

"Like telling a wasp to keep out of honey, that is," said Ebbutt, lugubriously. "But okay, Mr. Ar, the back way. Call it settled."

"Thanks, Bill."

"Always a pleasure," said Ebbutt, "especially on a job like this." He chuckled hoarsely. "You ought to 'ave heard the whistle wot went up when that picture passed rahnd. Know what Liz said? Lot of 'ungry ravenous wolves, she said. Okay, I know you don't want to stay and listen to me gassing, cheer-i-ho."

Rollison was smiling when he rang off.

Jolly appeared with a slip of paper, and handed it to Rollison, who read:

Benjamin Allen,
Heath View,
Heath Rise,
Hounslow, Middx.

"I've checked both in the telephone directory and in the street directory and haven't found anyone named Allen at such an address," Jolly said. "But when Ebbutt's man telephoned he seemed quite sure of himself."

"Who was it?"

"Higgs, sir."

"Sound chap, Higgs," said Rollison. "Did he tell you how he got on to the address?"

"No more than I've told you, sir, but you know how he is inclined to like to show off—and how he enjoys being somewhat mysterious on occasion. I understood that he was going to this house immediately, and that he would stay there until he had a message from you."

"Good," said Rollison. He had a mental picture of a lean, dark man with a strong-looking jaw and a ready smile in dark eyes. There was probably some Spanish or other southern European blood in Bert Higgs, a man of about thirty and, like most of Ebbutt's men, at one time a promising boxer. He had never fulfilled that promise, but would fight to the bitter end of any fifteen rounds. "I'll wait here until Tiny Joe comes, anyhow."

"Whom do you wish him to follow, sir?"

"Our Mr. Charles Russell," said Rollison, and explained both briskly and briefly, so that Jolly was fully informed, except on one matter: he knew nothing about the metal cylinder which had been tied to the engine of the Bristol. "Nothing else but these reports, Jolly?"

"No, sir."

"What did you think of Zana?"

"A very forceful character indeed," mused Jolly. "If I may be permitted to voice a purely speculative opinion, sir, I would say that he could be a very bad hater, and that he might easily arouse bitter enmity in other people of forceful personality."

"Yes," agreed Rollison, "I think you have something there. Someone hates. Zana may know who it is, or

he may only guess. But would anyone hate him badly enough to do all the things that are being done?"

"That is too speculative a matter for me, sir," murmured Jolly. "Now if you will excuse me, I am preparing a duckling for dinner, as you had very little lunch. And——"

The telephone bell rang.

He picked up the receiver quickly, as if to make sure that Rollison did not get out of his chair; to humour him, Rollison leaned back and yawned. But he could not miss the sudden change of expression on Jolly's face, or his swift, startled glance.

"Yes, sir," Jolly said finally. "I will certainly give him your message. Good-bye, sir."

He rang off.

He turned towards Rollison very slowly, and it was difficult to see the expression in his eyes. Certainly he didn't like what he had heard, and on the instant Rollison was sitting up straight, half afraid of what was coming.

"That was Mr. Grice, sir," said Jolly. "He asked me to tell you that the contents of the cylinder, tied to the starter arm of your car was in fact nitro-glycerine. He also asked me to tell you not to take any further chances at all. I cannot too strongly support that advice, sir."

There was a long silence.

"I know, Jolly," Rollison said quietly, "I feel much the same way about it myself. I'll keep my eyes open."

Jolly stood looking at him for some time, then bowed slightly, and turned and went away. It was almost as if he felt a premonition of evil things.

* * * *

Rollison sat back for twenty minutes, physically relaxed, mentally as alert as he had ever been. At the end of that time, he got up and went into the kitchen, where Jolly, wearing a chef's apron, was busying himself at a deal-topped table. The duckling, all ready for the

oven, stood in a baking tin, and the oven was on, the gas hissing gently.

"Jolly," said Rollison, sorrowfully.

"Yes, sir."

"No duckling for dinner."

"What do you require me to do, sir?"

"I'd like you to find out all you can about Zana himself, and follow him wherever he goes to-night. I think he'll be at the *salon* until after seven o'clock, so you've fair time. I'm going to telephone him now, and we'll soon know if he's still in. All we want is to know where Zana goes and who visits him, and whether he is being followed by Mr. Smith or by the police. Feel up to it?"

"Of course, sir."

"Don't forget what Mr. Grice advised," said Rollison dryly, and then went into the other room to telephone the *salon*. He was far too restless to sit back any longer. A girl answered him, brightly.

"Is Mr. Russell in, please?"

"Well, he is, sir, but he's very busy at the moment. Can I give him a message?"

"It's all right, I'll call him later," said Rollison. "Is Mr. Zana there?"

"They are in conference, sir, and——"

"That's fine, don't disturb them," said Rollison.

So Zana had been right and the artist had soon recovered from his burst of bad temper. Why? Was Russell involved, and did he therefore want to make sure that he was always at the heart of things?

Rollison told Jolly that Zana was likely to be at the *salon* for some time, then went into his bedroom. He knelt down and opened a drawer in the bottom of the five-foot wardrobe, and inside was a beautifully made mahogany box. He lifted this to the bed, took out his keys and unlocked the box, then unlocked a metal container inside it. Here were two automatic pistols, one

gas pistol in the form of a lighter used for ammonia gas pellets, two knives, one sheathed and one without a sheath, both fitting into a metal clip, something like a grip-type bracelet; these were made to fit the wrist or for the calf of the leg. Rollison fastened one round the calf of his right leg, where it did not impede his movements, and which he hardly felt at all. He slipped an automatic into his coat pocket, where it made only a faint bulge, put the lighter into the ticket pocket of his jacket, and clipped the sheathless knife to his forearm, close to the elbow.

He closed and locked the box and put it away; when he stood up, he was smiling very thinly.

"Now we're ready, Mr. Smith," he said *sotto voce*, and went out of the bedroom.

A moment later, he heard voices in the kitchen, and soon Jolly came into the study-cum-living room, and asked:

"Will you see Tiny Joe now, sir?"

"Ah, yes, Joe," said Rollison, and went to greet a painfully thin man who stood barely as high as Jolly's shoulder. He had a bright pink face, a thin nose and one cauliflower ear—this despite the fact that he was only twenty-one. "Joe," Rollison said, "I want you to follow a man named Russell, wherever he goes. I'd like a note of everyone he sees and every place he visits. We'll get someone to give you a rest later on."

"I don't want no rest, twenty-four-hour a day man, that's me," said Tiny Joe, and grinned as if he meant it. "Any strong-arm work required, Mr. Ar?"

"Not if you can help it."

"Bit disappointing, ain't it, sir?"

"Bill Ebbutt would rather you kept your knuckles for the next time you're in the ring," said Rollison. "Everything understood? Jolly will tell you where to find Russell, and all you need to know about him."

"Okey-doke, Mr. Ar."

"Okey-doke," responded Rollison, solemnly. "All right, Jolly, I'm off."

"Be extremely careful, sir," pleaded Jolly.

* * * *

That advice was on everyone's mind, and it was easy to understand. Rollison could still feel a shiver of alarm when he thought of that hammer hurtling through the air, and of what might have happened if it had set that cylinder rocking. Why set out to kill like that? Why was Mr. Smith so deadly and so desperate?

It seemed vital to him that Zana should be deserted, and left with no help at all; so vital that he would take such drastic measures to keep Rollison off, and to stop Maude from working for the designer.

Did he *know* that Maude had started to work for Zana?

If he did, who but Russell could have told him?

In simple truth, several people could, Rollison admitted as he went down the stairs, studying every step with care and making sure that there was nothing to trip him up or blow him to perdition. Russell was simply the most obvious one. The dressmaker, Mitzi, was another. There were several others at the *salon* who might have heard the news within a few minutes—a word from Mitzi in the dressing-room would have been quite enough to spread word.

Grice would be following up the work-room people, there was no need for Rollison to worry about the routine. He wanted to answer shock tactics with shock tactics, and if he could find Rose Mary Bell, if he could get her away from wherever she was hiding——

Unless she had left simply because she had been frightened, and wanted to stay out of Zana's reach. None of the other girls had named an individual who had lured or frightened them away from Zana. Why should the most famous of his models know any more?

Rose Mary might not be at Hounslow; but from what

he could gather of Jolly's report, Higgs had been very confident, which probably meant that the boxer was certain.

Twenty minutes later, at the wheel of a fast grey Jaguar hired from his garage in Piccadilly, Rollison was heading for Hounslow, the Heath, and the house of a man named Allen, where Rose Mary Bell might be.

14

HIGGS

WHERE the highwaymen had lurked, in distant days, there was a wide tarred road or narrow tarred paths. Where much of Hounslow Heath had been, there was little houses with little gardens, mostly well-kept, mostly bright, mostly with smoke curling gently from their chimneys. It was a typical London outer suburb now, with bungalows spreading almost like mushrooms, even along Heath Rise. This was a winding road, with open heath on one side, where children played. The scene was much the same as from the window of Beryl Ward's apartment—a group of eager footballers anticipating the season, a smaller group of die-hard cricketers determined to play for as long as they dared.

Rollison drove along at a moderate pace.

At the far end several large houses stood in their own grounds. They looked dark and almost forbidding, with their weathered red brick walls, big windows and slate roofs, and each was surrounded by a high wall, as if to defy the encroaching bungalows. But these bungalows came up to the very walls, and above two of the gates of the old houses there were boards, saying boldly in red: FOR SALE.

Soon there would be a dozen houses in the grounds of

each of these, and before long the other large private houses would fall, too.

Heath View was in the middle of this little group; the middle of seven.

It stood farther back from the road than the others, and Rollison thought that it looked smaller. Certainly the grey slate roof was not so high. The gate was closed, but freshly painted bright blue, as if the owner was determined to resist its puny neighbours, and meant to stay here for a long, long time. The gravel of the drive was clean and washed, a bright-ish yellow; the lawns were trim, well cut and well-watered; in flower beds asters and zinnias were bright and colourful, and the earth had been recently turned. The house itself stood, unexpectedly, in a shallow dip in the ground, as if to hide itself.

Rollison left his car a little way along, while he explored.

A notice on the gate, freshly varnished, probably meant exactly what it said: *Fierce Dogs.*

"Dogs in the plural," Rollison said thoughtfully, and opened the gate. No dog barked, but he was some distance from the house, and there was nothing to suggest that either dogs or humans had yet seen him. He walked briskly along the drive, making no attempt to hide himself; time for concealment, if any came, would be by night, when he might come again—if there was evidence that Higgs was right.

Higgs.

Rollison had half expected to see Higgs nearby, but the boxer was not in sight. He might be hiding behind some of the clumps of bushes beyond the lawns, for the shrubberies were thick and darkly green. As Jolly had suggested, it would be like Higgs to want to spring a surprise, it would tickle his sense of humour to fling a triumph at the Toff.

There was no sound from the house, and the noises

from the colonies of houses and children faded, as if the wall shut them off from sound as well as from sight. This might have been a house in the country, with nothing but fields surrounding it.

The doors and the windows were also painted bright blue, there were some other colours, and as far as an old Victorian house could look bright and fresh, this did—as if someone with taste and a knowledge of colour had helped to paint and preserve it.

There was still no sign of a dog.

Rollison reached the front porch, stepped on to it, and promptly rang the bell. Now he looked round, but no one had followed him, any more than Mr. Smith's men had followed him from London. No one appeared to have taken any interest in him at all.

There was no answer to his ring; and still no sound.

He looked at his watch, and saw that it was nearly half past six.

He rang the bell again, but still there was no answer. He tried to persuade himself that in these days of scarcity of servants, that was not surprising; yet he was surprised. He stepped down from the porch and looked towards the right, where the drive ran towards garages which he had glimpsed on his way up. He went towards them, still making no attempt to conceal himself, and his footsteps sounded clear and sharp upon the gravel. The wall went right round these grounds, in all very nearly an acre. The back garden had a large lawn, once used for tennis if the shape was any indication, and beyond this a vegetable garden was trim and neat, and looking as if it had yielded well. Apple and pear trees, heavy with fruit, were at the far end of the garden.

It was quite a place to live.

Rollison found that the doors of the garage were open, and looked inside; both garages stood empty, and neither contained anything unusual. There were some tool sheds behind them. The back door had a small porch,

and there was a covered way to the garages. Near it were two dog kennels, and if their size was anything to judge by, they usually housed big dogs. Rollison went to the kennels and knelt down. Inside were gnawed bones, straw, the odour of dogs; there was a kind of smelly warmth, too, as if the kennels had been occupied during the day.

He stood up, and looked at the windows at the back of the house; all of them were tightly closed. At the very top was one which made him frown, for it was barred. He could see nothing apart from the small windows, the bars which were painted bright blue, and the surrounding brickwork.

He banged on the back door.

There was no answer.

A house of this size simply couldn't be run and kept in good condition without servants, this——

He heard a sound, at last, and was startled. It was very like a groan, and came from behind him.

He swung round, but saw nothing that he hadn't seen before. He stood quite still, in case the sound was repeated—and it came again, quite unmistakably.

A groan, as of pain.

Undoubtedly it came from the far side of the garage, and there was a narrow gap between that and the wall. Rollison looked about him, but saw no one, so he ran across the gravel towards that gap. It was very dark there. The wall itself was almost as high as the garage, and it was hard to understand why one wall hadn't been used for the two purposes, but it hadn't.

The groan came again, more loudly, from inside that gap.

Rollison allowed himself time to get used to the darkness, and gradually picked out the shape of a man, lying on the ground. He saw no movement. He did see two shoes, glowing slightly with polish; it looked as if the man was lying at full length, and on his face.

Yes; there was the back of his head.

The gap was scarcely eighteen inches wide, it would be impossible to get in there and lift the man, but he couldn't be left there much longer. He might be desperately badly hurt.

Rollison squeezed into the gap, his shoulders tight against both walls, until he reached the recumbent figure.

It was a dark-haired man, and Higgs was dark-haired.

He couldn't *drag* the man along on his face, but had to get him out. How?

"All right," Rollison said *sotto voce*. "It's all right. I'll be back in two jiffs."

He hurried to the garage, where he had seen several ladders, and selected one about ten feet high and narrow enough to go inside the gap. He carried this round, looking about carefully and still unable to see anyone else; nothing suggested that he was being watched, or that anyone was inside the house.

He heard the groaning again.

He reached the gap, put the ladder on the ground, pushed, and eased it beneath the victim's legs. That wasn't difficult. Then he forced his way into the gap, and found that he could stand with a foot on either side of the man, his legs pressed tightly against the walls. He reached down, and eased the man along from the waist, drawing him gently on to the ladder. The man's groaning was neither better nor worse.

Inch by inch, Rollison moved him on to the ladder.

"That'll do," he said at last.

He rested, wet with sweat, gasping for breath. It was dark and dank here, and there was no room to manœuvre. He began to edge his way back, and as he did so, heard a dog bark.

The sound went through him.

If a savage dog came at him now, he wouldn't have a chance, for his back was to it, and the dog would have a freedom of movement denied to a man here.

The dog barked again, but it was some way off, and it didn't sound like a large dog.

Rollison reached the end of the gap, and there was no dog in sight. He brushed his hair back from his forehead and then bent down, gripped the ends of the ladder on which the groaning man lay, and pulled it slowly.

Was this Higgs?

Rollison felt quite sure that it was. The man, still lying on his face, had Higgs's kind of glossy dark hair, although there were dull patches now, and also had Higgs's kind of figure, lean and supple.

Rollison saw the bump at the back of his head; and soon saw more. There were scratches at the back of the man's neck and scalp which might be the kind that a dog's paws would make.

Now, the man was quite clear of the gap, and Rollison made himself go forward and, very gently, turn the head so that he could see the face.

He flinched.

This was Higgs.

And Higgs had been badly mauled by some big animal, his face was lacerated, there was a great deal of blood. One of his hands was mauled, too, and the sleeve of the coat torn to ribbons.

* * * *

What Higgs needed was a shot of morphia, to put him out of his agony, and then expert medical attention. Nothing else mattered. Rollison felt his pulse, and found it fairly strong, took off his coat and put it over Higgs, then turned and hurried to the house. This time he didn't lose a moment, but picked up a yard broom and cracked the handle against a small window. He knocked the pieces of glass out hurriedly, and climbed through. He scratched himself a little, but that didn't matter.

He listened for sounds, but heard none.

This was a scullery, beyond a kitchen, beyond that passages and a maid's living-room, if he was any judge, pantries and, in a wide passage, a telephone. He picked this up, praying that it would be live; it was. He dialled Whitehall 1212, and Scotland Yard seemed to answer almost before he had stopped dialling.

"This is Richard Rollison," Rollison said carefully, "and I am at a house called Heath View, Heath Rise, Hounslow."

"I've got that, sir. How can we help you?"

"There's a badly injured man in the grounds, just behind the garage," Rollison said. "Send an ambulance and a doctor at once, will you?"

"How did he get hurt, sir?" The man's voice sharpened.

"A dog mauled him. I mean really badly, it's extremely urgent. Refer to Mr. Grice, if——"

"We're calling Hounslow at this very moment, sir, someone will be there in two or three minutes."

"They can't come too quickly," Rollison said. "Thanks."

He put down the receiver, and found himself staring at a drop of moisture which had appeared on it, and which he hadn't noticed before. Sweat. He dabbed his forehead as he moved out of the passage into another, carpeted, one which led to the front of the house. Here was a wide staircase, with a passage on either side, and several rooms, leading off, all the doors standing open. He glanced into each room, and saw no one, but there was a small library where a desk in one corner looked as if a hurricane had blown through it. Drawers were out, papers heaped up, others littered the floor. Two of the bookcases were open, and books had been taken off the shelves.

This told the same story as the silence.

He turned and hurried up the stairs. At the first

landing, which was wide and imposing, there were two passages, and he saw several other doors, all but two of them open. Another, narrower flight of stairs was at the end of one passage.

When the police arrived they would take over, and he wouldn't have a chance to do anything himself. There might just be a hope of finding something which would be of help to him, and not to the police.

These narrower stairs were fitted with a strip of carpet.

As he ran up, he heard the engine of a car, and looked out of a small landing window. A police car was already turning into the gate, and several children were standing around and watching.

Rollison went on.

He reached another landing, where the ceiling sloped, and where there were only two doors. He tried the one on the right, but it was locked. He knew that this faced the back of the house, and was the room with the barred windows, so he took out the penknife with the skeleton key blade, and worked on the lock. He could hear the sounds of the police car, and thought that he heard men talking.

He could see only the brown-painted door.

The key caught the barrel. He turned, cautiously, for if it slipped he would have to start all over again. It didn't slip, but the lock clicked back.

He pushed open the door.

He had no idea what to expect, wasn't even sure that he expected anything. He only knew that the people who had lived here had been caught with fierce alarm, and had left in a desperate hurry. He could guess that it was because they had caught Higgs, and Higgs had told them that he had named both Benjamin Allen and the house.

Yet he felt as if he was opening a door on to horror.

He widened it slowly. There was no sound. He

looked about that part of the room that he could see, but the bed was behind the door; and someone might be lurking behind it, too. He peered round, but there was no one, and no danger that he could see; but when danger came from Mr. Smith, it was quite often invisible.

Then he saw the girl on the bed.

Her back was towards him. The bed was a single one, with iron ends and brass knobs at the posts. She lay on top of the clothes, wearing a green linen dress, and all he could be sure of at first was that she had quite beautiful legs.

Was this—Rose Mary Bell?

Rollison went to the foot of the bed, without taking his gaze from the girl, and when he could see her face, knew that he had reached the end of one search.

Rose Mary Bell was almost unbelievably beautiful, as she lay there.

She might be alive or dead.

15

ROSE MARY BELL

ROLLISON went nearer to the model who had been lost and was found.

He felt a strange, fast beat at his heart, had a feeling almost of suffocation. He had seen her photograph time and time again, knew her reputation, had even seen her at a distance, but this beauty was almost too superb to be real, and the thought that she might be dead had its own horror.

She lay quite naturally, one slim arm crooked at her waist, her auburn hair in close curls, which looked as if they had been combed quite recently. He couldn't be sure whether she was breathing, but there was a glow of

health at her cheeks and her lips were red; but for her stillness he would not have thought of death.

He bent down, and felt her pulse.

She was alive.

* * * *

Her pulse beat steadily if a little faintly, and rather slowly. Now that he was closer, Rollison could see her breast rising and falling, but her lips didn't appear to move. He stood quite still, only a foot or two away from her, as if he could not gaze upon such beauty long enough. The relief from the dread that she might be dead was so great that he felt almost dizzy.

He said: "Don't be a fool, you've seen a pretty girl before."

It was almost a sacrilege to call her "pretty".

At least she wasn't hurt, and at least she hadn't been scarred. Realisation of that reminded him of Higgs, and he straightened up and went to the barred window. He could see the garden next door, and the roof of the garage, but it wasn't easy to see the exact spot where Higgs had lain. He went closer to the window and stood on tip-toe; then he saw not only a police car and two policemen, but an ambulance and white-coated attendants lifting Higgs on to a stretcher.

The police would soon be up here.

If Rose Mary Bell were just asleep, if he could wake and question her before the police, he might learn something about Mr. Smith. But she was heavily drugged. That didn't matter, provided she wasn't badly hurt, unless——

He smiled, suddenly and tautly.

He heard movements on the floor below; it certainly wouldn't be long before the police came up here. They would take over, and would want the girl moved to a place where they could question her as soon as she came round.

"I think Old Glory will lend a hand," he said in a soft voice, and heard footsteps on the stairs just below. He took a last look at the sleeping beauty, then turned towards the landing, reaching it when two policemen were half-way up. They stopped abruptly, and one man said:

"Don't try any tricks."

"I haven't any left," said Rollison mildly, "but there's one in here for you. Ever heard of Rose Mary Bell?"

The spokesman cried: "Is she *here*?"

"She's here," asserted Rollison. "Look after her, won't you? I want to go downstairs and telephone Superintendent Grice." He handed the nearer man his card, which had his name and address on one side, and the ridiculous pencil drawing of a man without a face on the other, a top hat jaunty, cigarette jutting in a holder, and a monocle somehow giving an impression of a shining eye. "I'm Richard Rollison."

"You won't leave until you've seen the inspector, sir, will you?"

"No, I certainly won't," said Rollison. "How many more of you chaps downstairs?"

"Two, sir."

"Thanks," said Rollison.

He went down slowly, hearing the two men go into the attic bedroom. When he reached the foot of the stairs he stopped and listened, but heard no sound at all. They would be standing and looking at the girl, probably feeling much the same as he, unless he was far more susceptible than he should be. He remembered what he had said to Jolly, only this morning, and also remembered how sight of the girl upstairs had affected him. The possibility that she was dead had struck horror into him.

"Shake out of it," he said, and ran down the rest of the stairs.

One constable stood by the open front door, and a car was coming along the drive. There was no sign of the ambulance, but the crowd had become much larger now, and some were trying to get inside the grounds, but two policemen at the gate held them back. The constable looked at Rollison uncertainly while he went to a telephone on a table near the stairs, picked it up and dialled Whitehall 1212, speaking the number aloud.

"No harm can come from that, can it?" he said to the constable.

"Pretty safe in their hands, sir!"

Bright man.

"This is Scotland Yard."

"Superintendent Grice, please."

"One moment, sir."

Rollison leaned against the staircase, and wondered whether half an hour would have made much difference. Almost certainly an hour would have done. As certainly if he had told the police that he thought the girl might be at this address, they would have come at once to inquire.

He hadn't been sure.

Higgs had.

The hall was large and barely furnished, but with an old couch against one wall. It looked comfortable.

"Hallo, Rolly," Grice said, and for the moment at least he was quite friendly. "I've been told you've run into something else. You all right?"

"Shaken but surviving. I had a message from one of Ebbutt's boys that Rose Mary Bell was here at Hounslow, and came to see. I found Ebbutt's chap. They'd set the dogs on him, and then flown."

"Dogs?"

"Yes."

"Face?"

"Yes."

"Badly?"

"Nasty."

There was a moment's silence before Grice said very softly: "That's queer. Just a minute, Kennett." So Detective Inspector Kennett was still working on the case with him. "What was that about dogs in our report on the search for Zana's model? . . . Hold on, Rolly, I may have something. You really all right?"

"Yes. Except that I feel as doped as Rose Mary Bell is."

"You mean she *was* there?" Grice sounded incredulous.

"Was and is. Bill, listen, will you? I don't know how long she'll be unconscious, but I'd be surprised if she comes round for two or three hours. If she's at a hospital and surrounded by police when she does come round, she'll probably be scared out of her wits."

"What's your suggestion?" Grice was cautious.

"Let me take her to Lady Gloria's place; there'll be plenty of room for her," suggested Rollison. "You can have a policewoman in her room as a nurse if you like, but what we ought to do is encourage Mr. Smith to think I've got her, and that you haven't."

"I thought you had something up your sleeve," Grice said. "What good would that do?"

"Apart from the fact that Rose Mary isn't likely to be so scared at Lady Gloria's, she might talk more freely to me than to you. And the mysterious Mr. Smith might think it worth having a crack at her if she's at the Marigold Club, and not in a police nursing home."

"So that's it," said Grice. "Bait."

"Beautiful bait, Bill."

"Let me think about it," Grice said, and probably he was going to make sure that he could do what Rollison wanted without breaking rules and regulations, or seriously offending his superiors. "I can't see any objection at the moment, provided we have a nurse there when she comes round."

"You can. Fine!"

"I'll call Hounslow and give them a message soon," promised Grice. "Leave it to me."

"Gladly."

"Very co-operative all of a sudden, aren't you?" Grice asked suspiciously, and then said hurriedly: "Just a minute."

Rollison held on, seeing the constable eyeing him with undisguised interest. The police at the gate were having even more trouble with the crowd who wanted to get in, but Rollison hardly noticed this: he was seeing only those things in his mind's eye. Two were of startling contrast, and he wouldn't enjoy life while they existed side by side.

One was a picture of Rose Mary Bell's soft beauty, which seemed to have cast a spell.

The other was the picture of Higgs' face.

There were other things. Higgs wasn't married, but lived at home with his parents. Hell for his mother; she wouldn't be surprised if he was mauled in the ring, but this——

"You there?" Grice was sharp-voiced.

"Yes."

"I thought talk about dogs rang a bell," said Grice. "We've had more reports about these other models who worked for Zana. There are three instances where they were frightened by dogs. I needn't go into details," Grice went on, speaking almost too quickly, "but we've tried to find out from friends and relations if anything unusual happened to them before they left Zana, and here are three reports in a row about the dogs. We'll work on that. Now, is the Hounslow inspector there?"

"Someone's just arrived."

"Let me talk to him," urged Grice.

"Right, Bill," said Rollison, and then asked earnestly: "Tell him that it's all right to let me go, will you? He needn't give me the medal; you can do that yourself."

"Go get him," Grice said.

Rollison put down the receiver, but didn't go away at once. He heard men moving about just above his head, then realised what they were doing: carrying Rose Mary Bell. He moved to the foot of the stairs and stared up. Two uniformed men had made a chair for the model, and were now at the top of the main staircase. A plain-clothes man was just behind them; obviously he had gone up the secondary staircase, for Rollison hadn't seen him pass. He was middle-aged and authoritative-looking, almost certainly the local inspector.

Rollison studied the little group.

The two men carried Rose Mary with all the care that she should have; as if they were almost nervous of jolting her. She was still unconscious. They supported her so that her head leaned but did not loll back, and as he watched, Rollison felt the impact of her beauty even more than he had upstairs. It wasn't a normal reaction, and he wished it wasn't there; but his heart was thumping with that suffocating beat, which was something he couldn't deny.

He said: "Superintendent Grice would like to speak to whoever's in charge," as the men reached the hall. The grey-haired man hurried to the telephone, while the others went to the couch in the hall and gently put the girl down.

The inspector listened more than he spoke, and when he put the receiver down he turned to Rollison and smiled as if delighted to know who it was.

"I'd like you to tell me exactly what happened, Mr. Rollison," he said. "Then you're quite free to go."

* * * *

Twenty minutes later Rollison was at the wheel of the hired Jaguar again. No one took any notice of him, and the crowd round the gate of Heath View was much smaller. The police hadn't yet brought Rose Mary

away, but there was no hurry, for she was in no danger.

Would Grice let her go to the Marigold Club?

Rollison drove fast in the soft evening light, heading for the Great West Road, and then putting his foot down. The very fact of speed seemed to help him to think clearly. He could be quite sure that Higgs had scared Mr. Smith away, that the house had been the headquarters, that Mr. Benjamin Allen was closely associated with this Smith—might even be one and the same person.

The unconscious girl should be able to tell the police a great deal. Grice in his present mood would probably share his knowledge. That was a good thing, but there were too many things that were not so good.

Dogs—and Maude, for instance.

Where were the dogs now? How many people had lived at the Hounslow house? Would they all go to another rendezvous, or would they split up? What mood would Mr. Smith be in, now that he had been driven out of the Hounslow headquarters? At least his deadliness couldn't be much greater.

In Chiswick, forced to slow down to normal residential area speed, Rollison stopped by a telephone kiosk and called the Marigold Club. Ethel answered; a moment later his aunt spoke with the gruff authority of her years and training.

"Yes, Richard, what is it?"

He told her briefly.

"As I have already encouraged Maude to take part in this affair, I suppose I can do no less than have the girl here," said Lady Gloria. "There is a room. Very well, Richard, if you think it will be useful."

"I'm sure it will,"

"I hope you will make quite sure that the house is watched, you will remember that once before, when I allowed a young woman to take refuge here, murder was very nearly done. I don't want that to happen again."

Rollison didn't speak.

"Did you hear me, Richard?"

"Yes," he said, and didn't smile, for he said very quietly: "But it might be, Glory. Nothing guaranteed."

"I will have the room made ready," said Lady Gloria, and rang off with a brusque good-bye.

Rollison smiled as he blessed both her courage and her understanding. Then he turned round in the kiosk and pushed open the heavy door. It stuck a little, and he looked down to see if anything was in the way: he needed only to press his full weight against it. He did so, and the door opened and he staggered into the street.

A huge Alsatian dog came leaping towards him.

16

BRUTE

THE dog was no more than twenty yards away, and coming fast, leaping, heading straight for Rollison. Not far away was a small car, drawn up at the side of the road; there wasn't much doubt that the dog had come from the car.

It was a Ford *Consul*.

The first moment of shock was past, but Rollison had lost a second, and the dog was now only ten yards away. Its mouth was open, its great teeth showed—teeth which could lacerate a man as Higgs had been lacerated. Rollison could hear it breathing. He dropped his right hand to his pocket about the gun, but had no time to draw.

He fired through the cloth.

He couldn't be sure whether he had hit the brute, but darted to one side as he fired—holding the door wide open. The dog staggered; at least it had been hit. It

was only a few feet away, and if it turned on him Rollison couldn't hope to escape a mauling. Being wounded, it would be even more savage——

It almost fell.

It tried to turn on him, but couldn't.

He stepped swiftly from the door, and the dog was half-way inside the kiosk, yelping. The door slammed, pushing it right in. It was too badly hurt to find the strength to push the heavy door open, and Rollison swung towards the little black car. He had his gun in his hand now, and levelled to shoot. There was only the car driver, and Rollison saw the tension on the man's face, heard the engine roar. He didn't see another man come out of a doorway almost at his side, didn't know what was going to happen until the man struck at his arm, and cried out:

"Drop that gun!"

The sharpness of the blow forced it out of Rollison's hand; he had no chance to hold it. It clattered as he darted a look at the middle-aged man who had disarmed him. This wasn't one of Mr. Smith's *aides*, but a man who was doing his duty as a citizen.

"Don't pick it up, or——"

The good citizen broke off.

Rollison, checking his speed, saw why. The *Consul* was moving very fast, its engine still roaring, and it was only a few yards away. It mounted the pavement, jolting wildly, and came hurtling towards Rollison; and it looked as if he hadn't a chance to get away.

There was just one.

Between him and the car was the wall of a front garden, and he put his hands on this and vaulted over to the other side. He fell among bushes, staggered and lost his balance, and then thudded heavily to the ground. He heard the engine roaring, men shouting, brakes squealing. Then there came a high-powered roar, as of a car with the engine going at its fastest.

That sound faded.

Rollison picked himself up, awkwardly. He was scratched and his clothes were torn, but if the bushes hadn't been there he would probably have been badly hurt. As he bobbed up above the wall, he saw the man who had disarmed him standing and staring, several people standing on the other side of the road, and two cars pulled up. He could not see the little black car, but not far away was a turning to the right; the driver had probably gone that way.

He said: "How's the dog?" and brushed himself down as he went to the gate. The man holding the gun hadn't spoken, but kept staring. "Mine, I think, thanks," said Rollison, and took the gun from an unresisting hand. "It wasn't the best moment to be a hero, but that was quite something to do. Supposing I'd been a bad man?" He went towards the telephone kiosk, seeing several people hurrying towards him, and a policeman cycling fast.

The dog lay still and silent on the floor of the kiosk. So the wound had been fatal, or next door to it, and at least Mr. Smith had one dog less.

Rollison waited for the policeman, and while he did so, snapped his fingers and said in tart annoyance:

"What the hell's the matter with me? I didn't get that car's number."

"It—it might have *killed* you," breathed the man who had disarmed him, "and all you can say is——"

The policeman came up before he had time to finish.

* * * *

It was a little after nine o'clock when Rollison reached the landing of 22, Gresham Terrace. He did not move as briskly as he had been known to, felt very hungry, and was regretful: that Jolly would not be here with roast duckling. Jolly would be out watching Zana, and there was no way of telling whether he should be allowed

to take such risks. The risks had been bad enough before; the disaster to Higgs had sharpened their effect, that was all. Jolly shouldn't be used on this job, and certainly Maude shouldn't be.

Would she give up?

Knowing Maude, that was unlikely.

Rollison examined the outside of the lock, and saw no scratches, nothing to suggest that the door had been opened without a key; so he inserted his own. He did this very slowly, and turned it as slowly as if there was a possibility of danger from that simple action.

Nothing happened.

He opened the door cautiously, and still nothing happened, but he heard a sound.

He stood quite still.

This was one thing he hadn't wanted, the one thing he had almost feared. The pace was too hot. It was no use arguing, it was too hot. Jolly wouldn't be here as late as this, and no one should be in the flat. He knew exactly what he should do, but the physical effort was repugnant. He ought to go down into the street, hurry to the courtyard at the back, come up the fire escape, as Tiny Joe had done, and then enter by the back door. This would take whoever was inside by surprise. He had done it before a dozen times, and had never felt the same reluctance as he did now.

No duckling, and instead——

A footstep sounded heavily.

"That you, Mr. Ar?" a man called bluffly; it was the voice which Rollison could never mistake, for there was only the one like it in the whole of London.

A huge man appeared from the kitchen. He filled the doorway with his barrel of a stomach and his great height and his massive arms. This was Bill Ebbutt, once a heavyweight who could stand up to terrific punishment in the ring, now the owner of the Blue Dog in the Mile End Road, the owner of Ebbutt's gymnasium, and

manager and trainer of half the hopeful boxers in the East End of London.

"Why, 'allo, glad you're back," he greeted. "Wondered wot had detained you, Mr. Ar." His huge right hand came out and engulfed Rollison's; then he blinked—for he was very short-sighted—and as he gripped, he frowned. "What's 'appened to you, Mr. Ar? You look as if you've been rolling in the bushes."

Rollison chuckled. "That's it, Bill, literally."

"Why, your face is scratched, too," said Ebbutt with loud concern. "You bin 'aving a bit've a rough and tumble? You'd better go and bathe those scratches while I get a bite of supper ready."

"Supper," echoed Rollison. "You never said a nicer word. What's it to be, fish and chips?"

"Blimey, think you're in luck to-night, don't you?" scoffed Ebbutt, and shepherded Rollison into the bathroom.

Rollison inspected himself with some interest. Most of the scratches were underneath his chin, but one ran down the side of his nose. He'd grazed his hand badly, too, and there were scratches on his legs, but he had come off much more freely than his suit. That was beyond invisible mending, and he took it off, washed, and dabbed the scratches with an antiseptic, then put on a royal blue dressing-gown which had *fleur de lis* worked on it by an aunt since dead and gone. He went into the big room, thinking a little sadly about the roast duckling, and turned to the dining alcove. Ebbutt was standing there, but the table was laid as only Jolly could lay it.

"Ready, Mr. Ar?"

"Famished, Bill."

"Lot o' cutlery for a bit o' bread and cheese," said Ebbutt. "Talk about one 'alf the world not knowin' 'ow the ovver 'alf lives. But you earn your silver plate, I'll say that for you." He went out massively, and Rollison helped himself to a gin-and-it.

Ebbutt returned, bearing a silver dish. He placed this in front of Rollison, stood back to survey it, and plucked the lid off. Already the aroma was telling its own tale, and Ebbutt's grin told another. There on the silver salver was a roast duckling, looking as brown and rich and succulent as any Jolly had ever prepared for him.

"Now I'll fetch the green peas and the apple sauce," boomed Ebbutt, and rumbled off, coming back with two steaming dishes, one in each great hand. "Did it hisself, Jolly did, and give me instructions on 'ow long it was to cook for. Give me the perishing willies, he did; he said you'd be ready by 'ar-past eight latest, and here it's bin, spoiling. But cooking never 'urt duck, Liz says. Look okay?"

"Wonderful." Rollison's eyes glowed. "Where's your plate?"

"I've had all I want in the kitchen," said Ebbutt. "You eat in peace." He heaved himself towards the kitchen again, and then stopped in the doorway. "I knew there was sunnink, 'ead like a sieve I've got. Gricey telephoned."

Rollison almost forgot roast duckling.

"Any message?"

"He said the young lady's going where you asked."

"Oh," said Rollison, and smiled and relaxed. "Bless his old heart! Bill, there's a job for you. I want at least half a dozen of your best men to spend the night at Lady Gloria's place. They'll have to have shake-downs in the kitchen. There might be trouble, and I'd hate your chaps not to be in it."

"The old girl still ready to take it on the chin?" marvelled Ebbutt, who had been known to boast that Lady Gloria was his one friend among the aristocracy. "Can't 'elp admiring 'er, can yer? Well, enjoy your dinner. Never know if you'll live to 'ave another, do you?"

"No," agreed Rollison, unexpectedly sober. "No,"

he repeated, "I don't. Come and sit down, Bill." That tone brooked no denial, and while he ate he told Bill Ebbutt what had happened to Bert Higgs.

He could almost hear Ebbutt asking himself how he was going to break this news to the injured man's mother. That was the real horror of this affair—the people it was hurting apparently for no good reason.

Who would be hurt next?

17

ROUGH SKETCHES

"WELL," said Charles Russell, "what do you think of them?"

Maude studied the "rough sketches".

To many people they would have looked like finished drawings. They were all in black and white, drawn with great economy of line, and each was unmistakably her. The clothes, as unmistakably, were new creations. The more she studied the sketches the more difficult it was to say why it was so obvious, but these were clothes which had been made only for one person: for her. A line at the shoulder, the breasts, the waist, the hip, and each had that little "difference" which, when built into the actual clothes, would make them superb. Russell had drawn all these from Zana's pencil sketches.

"No comment?" he asked, a little dryly.

Maude said: "If I told you how good I think they are, you'd say I'd kissed the Blarney stone."

His eyes kindled with pleasure.

"Thanks," he said. "Queer thing, how everything starts to go right when everything seems to have gone wrong. I'd have said that I was in the foulest possible mood to-day, and couldn't draw a decent curve. Zana

felt the same——" he hesitated and then grinned. "Well, he says he did! But I doubt it. He's capable of forgetting the rest of the world—atom and hydrogen bombs not excluded—when it comes to creating clothes for a lovely woman. You *are* lovely, you know."

"The important thing is whether I'm going to be any good as a model."

Russell grinned.

"I deserved that! The answer's yes. Apart from all the recent troubles, we've been very short of an English country-woman, *Sketch*, *Tatler* and *Country Life* kind of model. We don't seem to breed 'em here to-day. I suppose when the lady of the manor has to scrub her own floors it does something unkind to the figure. It's been one of the big weaknesses of Hugo's collection, and he's been trying to strengthen it for a long time. You do it."

"Charles," she said, "don't talk for the sake of talking."

"It's as true as I stand here," Russell assured her. "Hugo thinks you're good. You really can wear clothes. He's already told me to arrange for a private showing to the Press next week, for a spring collection, and that means he intends to be busy and never mind what gets in his way. He hasn't any other model for spring clothes, either."

"It sounds wonderful."

"Come and have a drink with me and we'll celebrate," Russell said. "I shouldn't think Hugo will want us again to-night; he'll probably be having birth pangs. I'll make sure, anyhow."

"I'll wait," Maude said.

Russell nodded and went out of the studio. This was at the top of the building, all of which was occupied by Hugo Zana, and it had a fine north light. This light was still good enough to see by, although it was nearly half-past eight. Alone in the room, Maude studied the drawings more closely. There were six in all; two of

suits, two of topcoats, one a coat and skirt, one in a three-piece. There was a touch of genius in the drawings. She knew that when Zana had come to see whether the drawings did justice to his pencil sketches, he had looked from one to the other, nodded almost curtly, and then gone out without a word. She had feared that he hated the sight of them, but Russell ought to know.

Maude felt very tired and relaxed.

The odd thing was that until he had reminded her of the dangers, she had almost forgotten what had happened at Anne's tea-shop, forgotten that the man whom Zana had nearly killed had sprayed all of them with disfiguring acid. Now, she felt shivery because of it. Perhaps it was because she was tired, too, for she had been standing in the studio for nearly three hours, with short rests in between, while Russell had sketched and Zana had come in to look over his shoulder, and then to stalk out again, shepherded by little Mitzi.

Maude lit a cigarette, and as she drew in the smoke, Zana came in. He walked swiftly; in another man his walk might have been a strut. He looked ugly and yet homely as he stood and eyed her, giving a quirk of a smile. She wondered why he had come and what he wanted to say, and whether Russell had been right about his views.

"You are very tired," he said abruptly. "Charles will take you for a pick-me-up. Is nine o'clock in the morning too early?"

"Of course not."

"It is too early for many models," Zana said, spreading his hands in disgust. "There was a girl who walked out because I expected her to be here two mornings in succession at nine-fifteen! I believe she is now selling hats in Oxford Street." His smile had a puckish charm, but gradually it faded as he came nearer. "Are you afraid?" he demanded.

"Not very," Maude answered. "Especially now that the police are watching me."

"That's right," said Zana, "the police are watching and Rollison is working, and perhaps it will soon be over. We shall see." He heard Russell approach, and his smile came back as he turned to greet the artist. "Two drinks for her at the most, Charles, and then home to bed. To-morrow you will be here at eight-thirty, please. I will indicate the colouring variations and the three-piece must be finished by mid-day. Mitzi will have the girls ready. I shall select the material by morning light. Now, off with you!"

He shooed them towards the door.

Outside there were two policemen in plain-clothes, and nearby was Jolly, although they didn't see him. Selling newspapers at the corner was a little man, almost a midget, who kept calling out "piper". He strolled in their wake, one of the plain-clothes men strolled after them, and Russell said:

"It's like having a bodyguard. Let's drop into the Orange Club; it's near your place, and you can get straight home afterwards."

"It sounds just right."

"Here we are, then," said Russell a few minutes later, and they stopped at a house in one of the narrow streets linking the graceful squares of Mayfair. Over the front door was a kind of inn sign, with an orange tree on it, and in tiny lettering the words *The Orange Club*. The door was open, and Russell stood aside for Maude to go in, and then followed.

The door closed behind them.

A second plain-clothes man, who had followed at a distance, drew level with the first and said:

"I'll go round the back, Jim; you stay here."

"Okay. Don't drink too much."

"I'm not going to have a snifter until this job's over," the first man said, and hurried towards the corner and a narrow alley which led to the back of the houses in this street, and the back of the Orange Club. This

was a little concrete yard, with a few dozen crates of bottles and two small barrels outside, and a faint smell of spirits and of beer. It was pleasantly warm, and the Yard man settled himself on one of the barrels and lit a cigarette.

* * * *

Zana did not leave the *salon* until nearly eleven o'clock. Then he went with Mitzi to his small service flat only ten minutes walk away, talking to the little woman all the time. Jolly saw them go in at the front door, and also saw that one of Grice's men had followed. Grice was taking no more chances than Rollison, that was one good thing.

* * * *

Grice, in fact, was just going home.

It was nearly eleven o'clock then, too, and he hadn't been home since seven-fifteen that morning. It had been one of his heaviest days, and he left a desk piled high with paper work which he promised himself he would do first thing to-morrow.

He felt jaded and disappointed.

The man Harrison, caught at Hill Court, had stuck to his story that Rollison had shot Beryl Ward, and nothing would change it. Harrison refused to say anything about himself. His flat was a small one at Knightsbridge, and the police had found nothing there that would help. As a prisoner, Harrison was a dead loss; Grice had a feeling that it wouldn't be possible to make him talk any more.

The second man, whom Zana had nearly killed, was still in hospital. His name was Holden, and he pretended that he couldn't remember anything. Two doctors asserted that it was possible that the shock of Zana's attack had in fact given Holden a temporary mental black-out. Grice felt sure that the man was trading on this, and would go on doing so. He gave the

same impression as Harrison: that he would be hard to break down.

Holden lived in lodgings in Chelsea. His landlady had professed to be greatly shocked when she knew that the police were inquiring into his recent movements, and about his friends. He had few friends, the landlady said.

Beryl Ward's flat yielded nothing, either. She had lived there only for a little while, and paid her rent monthly in advance and in cash. No one knew very much about her, but she had two or three men friends—not unusual at Hill Court. One man was identified as Harrison, another as Holden, but so far the police had found nothing beyond that.

Grice had heard from Chiswick about the Alsatian's attack on Rollison. The body of the Alsatian was already at Scotland Yard, but its leather collar had no markings on it, and only smeared finger-prints. It was of good quality, and first thing in the morning the police would start looking for every owner of an Alsatian who had bought one like it in the past few months. Experts said that it hadn't been worn for more than six weeks, so three months was a fair margin. It was the nearest thing to a " clue " which Grice had.

No one had taken the number of the Ford car in which the man had escaped. Two witnesses had come forward to say that the dog had come from that car, but without the number that didn't help.

Grice had put into operation a check on all owners of Alsatians in the London and Home Counties area. He had also had an intensive search put in hand for the missing owner of Heath View, where the dogs had attacked Higgs. Neighbours knew very little about the man named Benjamin Allen; he kept very much to himself. But there were some clues. Allen was a smallish man, by all acounts, and ran a grey Jaguar car as well as two small ones—including a black Ford *Consul*.

Finger-prints found in the big house proved that Harrison, Holden and Beryl Ward had been there within the past day or two, and there were a number of other finger-prints not yet identified. No one had heard anything of the attack on Higgs, but the local children who passed the gate of Heath View hurried by whenever it was open, for the dogs—three in all—were known to be fierce.

And two were still at large.

No one in the neighbourhood seemed to have any idea that Rose Mary Bell had been at Heath View.

Grice believed that the chief hope of getting quick results lay in the unconscious model coming round, and being ready and willing to talk. She was at Lady Gloria's residential club, a policewoman was in her room all the time, and two policemen were on duty in the hall. Grice had also learned that the domestic staff of the club had been increased by two odd-job men, friends of Ebbutt, since the early evening.

Grice left the Yard and drove straight to Gresham Terrace. A Yard man was walking up and down, and Grice knew that another would be watching the fire escape at the back of Number 22. He didn't see Ebbutt's men here; they were probably in the flat. He hurried up the stairs, and Ebbutt answered his ring quickly.

"Why, wotto, Mr. Grice," he greeted smoothly. "Come to consult the expert?" He even kept a straight face. "Come in; I don't suppose 'e'll charge yer. Mr. Ar!" The foghorn of a voice echoed about the lounge hall and the room beyond. "Gentlemen by the name o' Superintendent Grice has come for a conserltation. Okay to let 'im in?"

Rollison appeared in the doorway.

"Two Bills together," he said, and grinned at Grice. "Hallo, Bill. Bill E., go and help yourself to a bottle of beer—you know where Jolly keeps it—and make sure you don't get earache."

Ebbutt looked puzzled.

"My ears is all right," he asseverated.

"The keyholes here are streamlined, and the air whistling——"

Ebbutt roared with laughter.

"Cor lumme," he said when he'd recovered, "he don't inprove much, do 'e, Gricey? Here's 'ealth!" He went off to the kitchen, and Grice chuckled as he disappeared.

Rollison took the Yard man into his study. Grice, who seldom drank, had a whisky which he murdered with soda; under its influence he told Rollison everything that had happened and everything that had been discovered.

"And I've had the A.C.'s permission, too," he said. "Rolly, I want the flat truth. Have you any idea at all what's behind it?"

"Except in general terms, not the faintest," said Rollison, "but I haven't been on the job long."

Grice eyed him sceptically.

"That's why I'm here. I'd like to know exactly when you did start, and how long you've known it's been as deadly as this."

"I started at noon to-day."

"Oh, don't keep that up," said Grice. "If you started at noon to-day, why should this lunatic try to kill you twice? Once at your car with that *nitro*, once with the dog? I suppose it's three times, if it comes to that—they had a cut at the tea-shop. You're not going to convince me or anyone else that directly he heard 'Toff' the killer decided that he daren't let you live for another minute. This Smith has come right out into the open since you were actively involved, and done himself a lot more harm than he'd done before in weeks—months, if it comes to that."

"Yes," agreed Rollison, "he has. I wish I knew why. Any fresh news on Beryl Ward?"

"No—only what I've told you. Are you telling me the simple truth?"

"Gospel."

"Then I understand it even less," said Grice, and was undoubtedly still sceptical. "The best chance we have is getting a line on these Alsatians, finding out where the collar was bought and where the garden syringe was bought, too." He stood up. "But if you want us to play ball with you——"

"Bill, I said gospel," reproached Rollison, and picked up the bottle of Scotch. "Spot more to undilute that? All right, I——"

The telephone bell rang; he put the bottle down and picked up the receiver in one and the same movement, said "Hallo," and almost without a pause handed the instrument to Grice. "The Yard," he said. "You must have told them you were coming."

Grice said: "I didn't, I—never mind. Hallo, Superintendent Grice here. . . ."

Rollison watched him closely, saw the light which leapt to his eyes, and the way his hand tightened about the instrument.

"Fine," he said. "I'll go there myself." He put the receiver down with a snap, and went on in the same breath: "I suppose I can't keep you away, Rolly. Mary Rose Bell has come round."

"Well, well," breathed Rollison. "Who's to give who a lift?"

18

BEAUTY TALKS

A PLAIN-CLOTHES sergeant opened the door of the Margold Club, and behind him hovered one of Ebbutt's men, a heavyweight who might not have much success against continental contenders, but whose punch

was quite enough for ordinary mortals. Rollison and Grice stepped into the noble hall, and Grice asked abruptly:

"Any more news?"

"Lady Gloria's up with her now," said the plain-clothes man, and he gulped. "She—er—she asked me to make sure that she wasn't interrupted, sir."

Rollison grinned.

"What else did she say? Not even by that nincompoop of a nephew of mine, or by that ridiculous policeman, Mr. Grice?"

The sergeant didn't know whether to grin or to be apologetic.

"Something like that, sir."

Grice said mildly: "Where's the nurse?"

"Still upstairs with them, sir."

"That's the main thing," Grice said, and then the housekeeper came out of the room where Rollison had lunched that day, tall and nice to look at but smiling rather a set smile and looking as if she was worried. She knew Grice slightly, and was formal; her expression said that she wanted a word with Rollison on his own.

Grice turned to the sergeant, as if earnestly.

"Hallo, Ethel," Rollison said, and added in a whisper: "Ebbutt's men causing trouble with the staff?"

"Oh, they're all right," Ethel said, "but I'm worried about Lady Maude."

Rollison felt himself go colder.

"Why?"

"She's not home yet, and it's nearly ten o'clock. It wouldn't matter normally, but she promised Lady Gloria that if she was likely to be out much after nine, she would telephone. We haven't had a message. I suppose it's all right, but——"

"It could be ugly," Rollison said quietly. He didn't like the news at all, but turned to Grice without showing any sign of perturbation. "Have you heard from your chap who was watching Lady Maude?"

"An hour or so ago, she went to the Orange Club with Russell," Grice said. "I've two men watching the place."

"An hour?"

"I had the report just before I left."

"Check, will you?" asked Rollison.

"Go outside and use the radio in my car," Grice said to the sergeant. "Ask for the latest report on Lady Maude Dennison. Information Room knows all about it." As the sergeant hurried and Ebbutt's men watched from afar as if anxious not to get too close to a Superintendent at Scotland Yard, Grice went on: "I'd have been called if anything had gone wrong. They left the *salon* together about eight-fifteen. Zana left much later, with the woman Mitzi, and went to his flat with her. I don't think there's any need to worry."

"Mr. Smith doesn't take long acting when he decides to act," said Rollison, dryly. "Bill, here's one for you alone." The housekeeper had gone towards the domestic quarters of the club, and Rollison and Grice stood together in the hall. "What do you know about Russell?"

"I didn't know much until we started checking him, to-day," said Grice. "He's a son of the Flinden Russells."

"*The* Flinden Russells?"

"That's what I said."

"Good lord and shades of shipping millions!" exclaimed Rollison. "When is this job going to stop turning me upside down?" He found himself lighting a cigarette. "That makes him a millionaire-plus."

"It means that he stands to inherit about twenty-five million pounds, unless he gets it given to him beforehand to avoid death duty, and it also means that he's likely to inherit one of the biggest shipping companies in the world," Grice declared, and smiled wryly. "Yet he works as an artist for Zana. He always wanted to paint, from what I can gather. His father's hale and hearty

and the Flinden Line runs itself, so he was able to see if he could make a success in art. He's had a few small exhibitions, hasn't made much of a hit, but has a flair for this kind of drawing and for colour. Been suspecting him?"

"I wondered," Rollison said, almost sadly. "One or two things pointed, but—oh, no, that couldn't be it, could it? A Flinden Russell wouldn't——"

"Unless he's a psycho, it's hundred to one against."

"He doesn't look a psycho to me."

"They don't all tell you about it on first meeting," Grice said dryly. "Anyhow, we'll soon know. Here's Morgan."

Morgan was the sergeant, but he had no definite news. Nothing new had been received at the Information Room, and a patrol was going to make sure that Russell and Lady Maude were still at the Orange Club. Almost before Morgan had finished speaking, there was movement at the head of the stairs, and Lady Gloria appeared.

"I think she gets more like a ramrod every time I see her," Grice whispered.

"*If* you've finished muttering," said Lady Gloria, a glint in her eyes, "you might be interested to know what the young woman has said."

"Yes, please," Grice said, hurriedly. "Good evening, Lady Gloria."

"Good evening, Mr. Grice." Lady Gloria unbent, enough to smile at him, and to nod at Rollison.

Rollison felt his heart beating very fast.

He could not get the picture of Rose Mary out of his mind; even knowing that she had come round and had talked was less important than the fact that she existed. That was a fact. He wanted to go upstairs, wanted to see her again, wanted to see what she was like when she had come round. It might be crazy, but it was true.

"She tells a very straightforward story," Lady Gloria said. "She reached her flat two nights ago feeling very tired and jaded. She had quarrelled with Mr. Zana—I gather that there are many such temperamental in-

cidents at the *salon*. A friend of hers named Allen, Benjamin Allen, telephoned soon after she got home and invited her to spend the week-end with him and his wife at a house in Hounslow—the name of the house is Heath View. So she packed a bag and went. She spent a normal evening with Allen and his wife, went to bed quite normally, and doesn't remember anything else. Presumably a sleeping draught was put in her drink or food."

Lady Gloria stopped.

Grice said incredulously: "And that's *all*?"

"Had you any reason to expect a more dramatic tale?" asked Lady Gloria.

"He could hope," said Rollison, glancing up the stairs. "Did she say anything more about this Benjamin Allen?"

"She has known him for years."

"How is she now?" Grice demanded abruptly.

"I think she is quite well enough to answer questions, within reason," Lady Gloria said, "but I hope you won't both go up together. I am bound to say, Richard, that I think this is a matter which you ought to leave to Mr. Grice."

"Just this once, I'll have to disagree," said Rollison apologetically. "I think we'll go together. Coming, Bill?"

Grice said: "If I ask you to leave me alone with her——"

"Out I go!"

They started up the stairs. Rollison felt a gnawing anxiety about Maude, but that was subservient to seeing the girl upstairs. It shouldn't be. Beauty could blind, and beauty was blinding him—and beauty had talked. He let Grice go ahead. The police weren't taking any risks at all, for another Yard man was just outside the door, and when Rollison went in he saw the little nurse sitting in a corner, not only able to hear and see Rose Mary, but able to watch the window, too. The nurse looked tiny and charming, and nothing at all like a

policewoman. She sat just behind Rose Mary, at the head of the bed, and as Grice entered she drew a small notebook from her pocket, and showed it.

"I've got everything down," she seemed to say.

Grice approached the girl on the bed.

Rollison stared at beauty. . . .

She wore a pink bedjacket, and the sheets, the bedspread and the pillow-cases were pale blue. He had never seen anything more lovely in his life. The bedjacket wasn't drawn tightly at the neck, and the low-cut pyjama jacket or nightgown she was wearing probably hadn't met with Lady Gloria's approval. There was the exciting swell of her breast; and all her beauty.

She seemed drowsy, but spoke quite clearly and rationally. She made no protest at being questioned. The questions and answers did not greatly help, except that she gave a description of a man named Benjamin Allen which might fit into the description of the driver of the Ford *Consul*, both in Mayfair that morning and at Chiswick this evening. The driver was a man about thirty, dark-haired, well-dressed; Mary Rose didn't know what Allen did for a living, but she'd known him and his wife for some time.

There was nothing remarkable about it, apparently. She had often spent a day or two with them, and occasionally longer. They had a big house with plenty of room for guests, although the servant problem had made difficulties; she had always lent a hand. If one could believe Rose Mary, she was as domesticated as Jolly.

"Whom did you meet first?" Grice asked. "Mr. or Mrs. Allen?"

"Oh, Beryl," Rose Mary said, at once.

Rollison caught his breath.

"Beryl Allen," said Grice, very softly. "Do you know her maiden name?"

"I have heard it, but I don't really remember," said Rose Mary. "I really can't see that it matters."

Grice took a photograph of Beryl Ward out of his pocket, and showed it to the girl.

"Is that her?"

"Oh yes," said Rose Mary, eagerly, "that's Beryl. What a good picture! Where did you get it?" Although she asked the question she didn't really seem to worry about Grice's evasive answer, and she stifled a yawn. Her eyes looked heavy, there wasn't much doubt that the drug still affected her. "I don't want to be uncivil, but I'm *so* tired."

"Just two more questions," Grice said, quietly. "Did Mr. Allen keep dogs?"

"Oh, yes, several, all Alsatians," she said. "They were beautiful dogs, too, he used to train them. Dog training was his hobby," she added, and thought of the dogs seemed to have cheered her up.

"The other question is this," said Grice, just as quietly. "A number of Mr. Zana's other models have left him recently, and others won't work for him. Do you know why that is?"

She knew; that was obvious in her expression. But she said that she didn't know, and it seemed certain that nothing would make her talk to-night. She could take refuge in her tiredness, and feel sure that there was no way in which they could force her to talk.

* * * *

"See that?" Rollison was almost abrupt as they left the room.

"You mean, she knows the reason and is terrified."

"Yes."

"We'll break her down to-morrow," Grice said.

"Bill, I don't think I'd be too sure," said Rollison. "If she's as frightened as I think she is, she might hold out for a long time, certainly too long for us. Mind if I make a suggestion?"

Grice was surprised into a laugh.

"First time I've known you trouble to ask permission in twenty years! What is it?"

"There are about four of the models, all the stars, who have reputedly left the country," Rollison said softly. "One went to France, one to the United States, one to Buenos Aires, one to Milan. Two cabled home, two lived alone, and haven't contacted their friends since they left. Trace them, will you?"

"What's on your mind?" Grice was sharp-voiced.

"We've been able to find the lesser lights, who stayed in England and got different jobs," said Rollison, "but we haven't yet any proof that the others are where they're supposed to be."

"I can't be sure what you know in this job," Grice said, "but I'll tell you this. Russell told me this afternoon that he flew to Paris to see the models there. They'd left."

"Left," Rollison echoed, and fear seemed to strike him.

"So he says," said Grice. "Anyhow, we're checking." He turned towards the stairs and added abruptly: "I wonder if Lady Maude is back."

They were half-way down the stairs when Morgan hurried in from the street, obviously agitated; that was almost the first time that Rollison's thoughts were wrenched from Rose Mary Bell and the four missing models. For if ever a man was bringing trouble, it was Detective Sergeant Morgan.

"What is it?" Grice rasped.

"Our man at the back of the Orange Club's been found, badly hurt, sir. Russell and Lady Maude left the club nearly an hour ago."

* * * *

There was a moment's pause, while this sank in, while all the dread possibilities struck home. Then Rollison turned towards the stairs again, and said between his teeth:

"Now Rose Mary must talk, whether she likes it or not. Bill—find those other dogs, find this Benjamin Allen, find the missing models. Find them quickly."

He went racing up the stairs and was near the top when he stopped and turned round. Grice was already at the open front door.

"Bill!"

"Hallo?" Grice turned.

"Ebbutt had Tiny Joe Laws following Russell, so if you put a call out for Tiny Joe, it might help."

"Right," said Grice.

Rollison tapped briefly at the door of Rose Mary's room, and thrust it open. Lady Gloria stood just inside with a finger at her lips. The "nurse" was standing up. Rose Mary lay there, a sleeping beauty who seemed to draw Rollison's very heart out of him.

"She's fallen asleep, I insist——"

"Maude's missing," Rollison said abruptly, "and this girl might be able to help us."

* * * *

Nothing he could do would wake Rose Mary. Anywhere else, without Lady Gloria and the nurse present, he might have managed to wake her, but here it was impossible. She slept as if she had been drugged again. Rollison felt sure that she was feigning sleep because she was too terrified to answer his questions, but there was no way to prove it.

He had to give up.

Now, the only hope was Tiny Joe Laws.

19

TINY JOE

CHARLES RUSSELL took Maude's elbow, half an hour after they had entered the Orange Club that evening, and shepherded her towards a door which she had noticed several times, but which no one except the

staff had used. He leaned close to her, and said quietly:

"This is the back way, I think it's safer than the front. I don't want to take any risks with you."

"It can't be as bad as that."

"Can't it," said Russell, grimly. They reached the door and he opened it on to a narrow, concrete-floored passage; there were crates of beer and mineral waters on either side, and only just room for them to walk in single file. "I'll go ahead," he added, but didn't draw far away from her. "I think this business is as deadly as anything could be, and I'm not simply trying to scare you. Zana's about the most stubborn human being in the world, and he's got more courage in his little finger than I have in my whole body, but he can be a fool. He's being put right on the spot, and he's tried to fight it alone. If I hadn't told him I'd go to the police, and to Rollison if the police wouldn't act fast, he'd never have gone. I don't mind telling you it wasn't easy to make him."

They reached a narrow door.

"Anyhow, there were policemen behind us," Russell said. "I don't think we need worry now."

He opened the door, and stepped outside. It was dark, although a beam of light shone out from a window above their heads. In this tiny yard there were few noises, and their footsteps sounded very clearly. The piles of crates and the barrels made shadows, and also made hiding-places, and Maude was glad that Russell had gone in front. He had scared her; and she knew that he intended to. She believed that in spite of all that had happened, he wished that she had not joined Zana.

Suddenly, she saw him stop.

She cannoned into him.

"Stay there," he breathed, and as he did so, Maude saw a man lying behind a pile of crates, crumpled up in a grey shape against the pale of the yard.

Russell went slowly forward.

Then, a man appeared from behind Maude. She

didn't take much notice at first, her heart was already thumping, but suddenly the man whispered in her ear:

"Don't move, and don't shout, or you'll never wake up again."

She swung round.

A man she had never seen before stood there with a gun in his hand. Then she heard a sharp exclamation from Russell, who had not seen or heard this man, but she dared not warn Russell.

A second newcomer appeared from the shadows, and stepped behind Russell, who had turned round. Maude saw the second man's hand upraised, a weapon in it; she cried out, but a cloth was dropped over her head, smothering the sound. She felt the cloth drawn tight round her neck, and believed that they were going to strangle her; believed that death was near.

* * * *

Grice and Morgan had gone.

Rollison stood by the telephone in the writing-room of the *Marigold Club*, feeling frustrated and quite helpless, knowing that his aunt was watching him with deep understanding, but that she could not help. He felt that he hated the sleeping beauty upstairs, but was quite sure there was no way of making her talk yet.

The telephone was ringing at his flat.

If Jolly was there, it might help. Ebbutt was good, but he was only a substitute, and——

"This is Mr. Richard Rollison's residence," said Jolly.

"Bless your heart," Rollison said, fervently. "When did you get back, and how's Zana?"

"I stayed until I felt sure that he had retired for the night, sir," Jolly said. "The woman Mitzi left, and I called Mr. Zana, and spoke to his manservant, who told me that he was in bed. Then I telephoned Ebbutt, who has arranged for someone else to watch Mr. Zana. The police are also doing that."

"He needs twenty, not just two," Rollison said urgently. "Any word from Tiny Joe?"

"He was following Lady Maude, sir." Jolly sounded aghast. "Surely she——"

"Missing," Rollison said abruptly. "Telephone Ebbutt, have everyone look out for Tiny Joe, spread the word round that it's desperately urgent."

"I will indeed! Where can I get in touch with you?"

Rollison didn't answer at once.

He couldn't do any more here. He couldn't do anything at the Yard, except get in Grice's way. He could go to the Orange Club and find out what had happened, or——

"Have we Russell's address?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir, I have it. Flat 3, Jeremy Street, Mayfair."

"If anything comes in before I'm back, telephone his place," Rollison said, "I might be there. And Jolly?"

"Sir?"

"Sure about Zana?"

"I really don't think I could have done anything more useful than I have."

"All right, thanks," said Rollison, "I'll be seeing you." But he didn't move from the telephone, just looked at Lady Gloria, who had pulled up a chair and was sitting and watching him. "I'm not so sure Zana's in bed," he said gruffly. "Do something for me, Glory."

"If I can."

"Telephone and insist on speaking to Hugo Zana in person. He has a deep, penetrating, heavily-accented voice, you couldn't mistake it. If this servant of his tells you that Zana's in bed, and won't call him, telephone the Yard and ask Grice to send someone to see Zana. I'd like to be sure that he really is at the flat. Jolly could have been fooled. Every trick known to crime has been used so far, I wouldn't be surprised to find some secret doors. Will you do it?"

"Immediately."

"Wonderful!" Rollison forced a smile. "Another thing. If Rose Mary should deign to come round——"

"Richard, I doubt whether anything short of physical violence would persuade that young woman to talk if she doesn't want to," said Lady Gloria. "I think you will have to accept that."

"If necessary I'll have to use matchsticks and thumbscrews to persuade her," Rollison said with a bleak smile. "Keep at her, whenever you get the chance. Evil things could happen to Maude. No one told you about Higgs, but if you saw Higgs after those dogs had finished with him——"

"There is no need to try to frighten me, I shall do all I can," Lady Gloria said stiffly.

Rollison's smile became much less bleak.

"Yes, I know you will," he said. "Another thing, Glory—is your car outside?"

"Unless Ethel has taken it to the garage, which I doubt; she's been too busy," said Lady Gloria. "I'll fetch the keys while you make sure."

Her car was a nippy little four-seater, for Lady Gloria Hurst had driven cars since the time when automobiles had first been made, and she had a great contempt for those who found London's traffic trying. Rollison sat at the wheel, fiddled for a moment, and drove off as smoothly as if he had been handling the car for weeks.

Russell's home was not far away.

It proved to be in a street not unlike Gresham Terrace, and less than half a mile away as the crow flies. Rollison pulled up near a corner, for there was good parking space, and got out. He had the gun, the knives and the little fountain pen tool-kit, as well as a pen-knife with ubiquitous blades, and these should be enough.

He went straight to the front door.

It was locked.

On the wall of the porch were three names, including Charles Russell's. Three flats, then, with Russell's on

the top floor. Rollison backed into the street, made sure that no one was coming and that no one seemed to be watching, and went back. He used a steel blade of his penknife to force the lock, and it took only two minutes. He opened the door and stepped into a dark hall.

He didn't close the door immediately, but no one approached. The door wouldn't latch until the lock had been repaired. Rollison waited for a minute, to get used to the gloom; faint light came from the first landing. He groped for the stairs and went up cautiously. There was light beneath a door of the second floor flat, and the faint sound of music, then of voices. Television. He went up the stairs to the next floor, took out a pencil torch, and shone it about cautiously. The stairs were carpeted, and there was a hint of luxury even out here.

He reached Russell's front door, shining the torch on to a small brass plate which gave the man's name, and promptly rang the bell. There was no answer, and the flat seemed to be in darkness. He tried again, and when there was still no reply, worked on the lock of this door as he had on the one downstairs.

It opened.

Darkness lay beyond.

Rollison stepped inside and pushed the door, but it swayed open. He switched on a light, which revealed a small hall, with some good French paintings on the walls, a thick carpet, some odd pieces of furniture which looked as if they were worth a fortune. He pulled a chair to the door, and stopped it from swinging open, then looked about the flat.

There were four rooms. One of them was turned into a studio, there were canvases and sketches, mostly of portraits, here and there of groups; Russell had always gone in for figure painting. On an easel, close together, were some sketches of Rose Mary Bell, and Russell had caught her almost hurtful beauty.

Rollison found himself gritting his teeth.

There was a bedroom, a living-room, and a small study-cum-library. Everywhere, there was evidence of wealth, and everywhere evidence of Russell's taste in art; a catholic taste, too. Most of the paintings were collectors' pieces.

That didn't matter.

Rollinson went into the library. Two walls were filled with books from floor to ceiling, but he was interested in books only if they offered him some clue. He didn't try them first, but pulled at the drawers of a small pedestal desk.

The drawers weren't locked.

"That's a help," he said, and sat down and took out the contents. Nothing he had found at Beryl Ward's flat had really helped, and the first thing of interest that he came across was a picture of Beryl Ward, just a publicity photograph.

Rollison seemed to see the small hole drilled in her forehead by the bullet which had killed her.

There were business papers, some files which showed that Russell spent some time on the Flinden Line affairs, and that he wasn't likely to refuse to take over control, if his father retired. A few letters from his father suggested that they were on good terms. These might have interested Rollison earlier, but now they hardly mattered.

Rollison opened another drawer, and found only one thing in it; a spring folder filled with several hundred typewritten sheets. Was Russell bitten by the writing bug also? A letter from Zana to Russell was slipped in the front, and Rollison read:

"*Here is the life story, as you wish to see it.*"

Rollison thumbed the pages, then found that there were photographs among them. One was of a concentration camp, and there was a mass of barbed wire round it. His mind flew to Zana's story of his escape, and to the sight of Zana's scarred arm.

Another picture showed Zana with Mitzi; another with Rose Mary Bell. A third showed Zana with two Alsatian dogs, huge, magnificent beasts, which stood as high as his waist.

This was Zana's story, mostly the story of his life. It was a carbon copy, and might repay reading, but Rollison couldn't bring himself to sit and read it now; so he glanced through it, picking up odd passages, oddly impressed by their vividness. The personality of Hugo Zana seemed to come through every paragraph. There was one vivid passage which told Rollison how little Zana had told him—as if he was ashamed of his own courage. For he had escaped from the prison camp with the woman, Mitzi; had nearly been caught because he had helped her. The story of what followed, as they had crossed hostile land in dead of winter, swimming icy rivers, climbing snow-clad mountains, was an epic.

Now such a man was being persecuted.

Why?

Rollison put the book aside, and tried the third and last drawer. It was locked. He took out his knife again, and was bending over it, when he heard a slight sound inside the flat. He listened intently, and heard it repeated.

Someone was inside.

Someone had a key.

Rollison did not turn round, but stayed there as if oblivious; but he worked the unsheathed knife down his forearm as he did so.

There came a sharper, nearer sound.

Now, Rollison glanced round, as if taken completely by surprise, and saw a man in the doorway, covering him with an automatic.

20

TRUTH?

ROLLISON was turned sideways towards the man, and his own left arm and hand was towards the desk. Clipped about the forearm was that knife, unsheathed and at hand. He could move that arm slowly and cautiously, without being noticed. He didn't move abruptly, but looked into the narrowed eyes of the man, who was short and dark-haired and swarthy, and yet in his way quite handsome. He had moved stealthily, and believed that he had taken Rollison completely by surprise.

That might make him over-confident and careless in what he said.

"So you're a thief, Rollison." That was sneered.

Rollison didn't answer.

"A thief found on the premises of a house he is robbing, how's that for a story?" the man went on. Then he added viciously: "Who'll be surprised that he was shot—*dead*."

Rollison was flexing his arm gently, and he felt the handle of the knife at his wrist.

"Don't move," the other said. "I can shoot where it will hurt, or where it will be over quickly."

He wasn't English, but he hadn't an accent like Zana's. His voice was quite smooth, and his phrasing natural as if he had been used to speaking English for a long time.

Rollison said: "Tell me just one thing."

"What do you want to know?"

"Why are you so anxious to kill me?"

"That's a poor attempt to make a fool of *me*," the man said, and his gun moved forward threateningly. "You know as well as I do."

"I don't know."

"You know," the other insisted, and then grinned: "You must know, but what a joke if you didn't!" There was a moment's pause before he added: "Stand up and face the wall."

Rollison moved his fingers, and felt the handle again. The knife was free of its clip, now. He got a firm grip as he began to straighten up. He could believe that this man would shoot him in the back, felt sure that there would be no reprieve if he once turned round.

Death had never been closer.

"Get a move on!"

Rollison straightened up with a jerk, and flung the knife. He saw the flash of the steel in the light, and saw the other start, saw his gun come up. Rollison darted to one side, and flung himself forward. He saw the knife stick into the man's gun hand, and heard the sharp report of a shot. A bullet thudded into the floor as Rollison reached the man and carried him back; the gun fell, heavily.

He struck with all his power at the man's chin, and his fist connected. As the man staggered back, Rollison stooped down and picked up his gun. It was a small automatic, the same size as the gun used to kill Beryl Ward and to shoot at Hugo Zana. He was breathing hard, but picked up the knife, clipped it on again, and didn't lose any time stepping to the door.

He reached the front door and closed it again with the chair against it. There was a sound outside, as of someone staggering.

Rollison went back into the library, where the man he had hit was trying to pick himself up. He hadn't a moment to spare, so he struck two powerful blows on the jaw; the stranger groaned as he collapsed.

Rollison lowered him, and hurried back to the front door.

It was still closed. He heard a sound of heavy breathing, and couldn't understand it; it was almost as if

someone was trying to mystify him. He crept closer to the door, and as he did so, a man said in a clear, Cockney voice:

"Strewth, you're a weight, you are, wouldn't like to 'ave to carry you to your coffin. Take it easy, chum, where's yer key?"

That was Tiny Joe.

Rollison stepped forward very quietly, and stood the chair aside. The door swung open an inch or two, but Tiny Joe didn't appear to notice that. He was supporting Charles Russell, and was so small that it looked as if he would collapse under the artist's weight. It was hard to believe that he had carried Russell up the stairs, but the man was draped over his shoulder, and Joe was trying to insert a hand into one of Russell's pockets.

"Don't worry about the key, Joe," said Rollison, "just walk in."

Tiny Joe jerked up his head.

"Cor, strewth!" he ejaculated. "You didn't 'arf give me a turn, I didn't know anyone was waiting. Evening, Mr. Rollison, 'ow's tricks?"

"They could be better. What happened?"

"To tell you the truth," said Tiny Joe, straightening up and coming forward, while Rollison opened the door wide, "I don't exactly know, and I'm afraid I'm for the 'igh jump when you 'ear about it. Mind you, my job was to watch Russell, and I did, didn't I? But I've a notion you'd rather 'ave 'ad the lady back than Charley Boy."

"Let's hear it all," Rollison said, and lifted Russell off the boxer's shoulders. It was much more effort for him than for Joe. He went into the library, where the light was on, and lowered Russell into an armchair. Just behind this was the still unconscious dark-haired man, but Tiny Joe didn't know that anyone else was there.

"Well, it was like this," he said earnestly. "I was trying to 'ave eyes at the back of me 'ead, watchin' back an' front, so to speak. I knew there was a rozzer at the

back and I didn't see 'ow even a rozzer could let anyone escape from the back of *that* place. I'd 'ad a dekko, to see wot it was like. So I put my money on the front of the Orange Club. When Russell and Lady Maude didn't turn up by nine, I said to myself, Tiny, I said, this is a rum do, this is. So I went to 'ave a look at the back. Cor lumme, wot a sight it was. There was the rozzer doubled up like a fresh-pickled corpse, and Russell sitting on a barrel and leaning against the wall as if he wouldn't never see the night through. Groaning something awful, he was. So what did I do? I 'elped to bring him round, and when he was able to stand on 'is own two feet, I brought 'im away. I was going to 'phone the Yard, truly I was, but a coupla dicks came nipping rahnd just arter I'd gone, so I decided there was nothing to worry about, they knoo the worst. So I got me a cab. Cost me a quid," added Tiny Joe, a little warily, "'ad to 'ave 'elp with Charley Boy, didn't I? Said 'e was sozzled, and I sprinkled some whisky over 'im to make it smell right, good thing I carry a flask. I got 'im to the corner, but didn't give the address away, my Ma always taught me to be careful. And 'ere we are, Mr. Rollison. But I don't fancy carrying him up no more stairs."

"No, I don't suppose you do," said Rollison, softly. "Very nice work, Joe, and it'll be worth fifty pounds at least. Like to do something else for me?"

"*Fifty?*" echoed Tiny, and his small, almost midget face looked bewildered; then he broke into a broad grin. "I'll run up and dahn stairs wiv' 'im for a fiver a time, Mr. Ar!"

"I'll help you into the bathroom with him, and you bring him round. When he's round, let him do what he likes except leave the flat."

"If you ask me, 'e's 'ad a dose 'o knock-out drops," said Tiny Joe, "but I'll bring 'im rahnd if anyone can, Mr. Rollison, just got to bring me old ring technique into

service. Goodness knows I 'ave to bring mesself rahnd often enough!" He grinned. "Don'tchew worry, I can manage."

He hoisted Russell to his shoulders, as he might a pillow. Rollison went ahead, opened the bathroom door, and stood aside for him to pass. He saw that Russell's eyelids were flickering; it wouldn't be long before he had come round.

The dark-haired man was coming round, too.

Rollison went through his pockets, and had an unpleasant shock. Except for a few pound notes, some silver and some keys, there was nothing in them. The man had emptied his pockets, to make sure that nothing in them could give him away.

He began to groan.

Rollison sat him in a chair, and then went into the kitchen and came back with a big jug of water. He splashed the man's face, and the eyes opened almost at once; he didn't want any more of it. He tried to cringe away from Rollison, but couldn't get far.

Rollison stood over him, massive and grim.

"Now we'll see how it works on you," he said roughly. "You're the one who'll be found dead if you don't come across. Who do you work for?"

The man didn't answer.

"*Who do you work for?*" Rollison stepped nearer, with his right fist clenched. "Why did you come here?" He was desperately anxious to ask where Maude was, but this man might not know that she had been kidnapped; if he didn't, it would be folly to tell him yet! In ten minutes' time, when he had been softened up, he could be asked about Maude.

Unless minutes mattered. . . .

"I'll give you one more chance before I start working on you," Rollison said in a hard voice. "Let's have the simple truth. Who do you work for?"

"Who—who'd you think I work for?" the man asked

in a scared voice, and seemed to be looking over Rollison's shoulder towards the door. "I work for Russell, don't I? Russell's the guy you want."

Was the answer too slick?

Rollison said flatly: "I don't believe you."

"If you don't believe me you'll be crazy," the man burst out. "We all worked for Russell; it was Russell who told Harrison to kill Beryl Ward; it was Russell who told me you and Lady M. were at the tea-shop, I passed it on to Holden. It was Russell who told me to fit that nitro-glycerine on your car. I wouldn't have done it otherwise, but Russell——"

He broke off.

There was a short, sharp whistle from outside the room, and Rollison turned round abruptly, dropping his hand to his pocket for his automatic. But he didn't draw it. The whistle was from Tiny Joe, and had been to warn him that Russell was on his feet again.

Russell stood in the doorway, holding on with both hands. His eyes were bloodshot, and his body sagged, but somehow he kept himself upright.

"There he is!" the little dark-haired man exclaimed. "He's behind it all, he——"

"Rollison," Russell said with an effort, "that's—that's a lie. I don't know——"

"So it's a lie," the other screeched. "You going to deny you've been trying to ruin Zana? You trying to deny that because Zana took your girl away from you, you haven't hated his guts? Why, you're crazy! That's what he is, Rollison, he's crazy! I realised it soon after I started working for him, but I'd done too much by then. I couldn't get away, or he would have stopped me."

He stopped, but was gasping for breath.

Here it was, thought Rollison bleakly, the mixture as before. Every trick known was being used, even the excuse that a man committed crimes because he was under threat from another, unknown, man.

It might be true, too.

Russell still clung to the door frame.

"Absolute—lie," he managed to say. "I've never seen him before. I was in love with Rose Mary for a year, but she preferred Zana, because she thought Zana held the money-bags. Her mistake. But I got over that six months ago."

"You got the nerve to say you haven't seen me?" cried the dark-haired man. "Why, anyone could tell you that——"

He broke off.

Russell said in a steadier voice:

"I don't know why he's doing it, but he's lying, Rollison. If I was behind this thing, would I have sent for you? I made Zana come and see you. I made him tell the police, but they wouldn't listen, so I told him that I thought you would. I told him what terms to put up, too. Does it make sense that I'd do that if I had anything to do with it? I'd be inviting you to prove that I was a criminal."

He stopped and looked as if he would fall. Tiny Joe moved, took his weight, and helped him into the room. Russell closed his eyes and shook his head slowly, as if to fight off the faintness; as soon as he was sitting down he seemed to get steadier.

"Why, you flipping liar," the dark-haired man rasped. "You told me to set the dogs on Rollison to-night! You telephoned and told me that the man Higgs was outside the house at Hounslow, and what more did you do? You told me to set the dogs on him. *And* you told Harrison to kill Beryl, you——"

Russell made a physical effort which startled Rollison, and took the dark-haired man by surprise. He hauled himself to his feet, then flung himself at the man. Tiny Joe, who had retired to the doorway and was standing and watching, leapt forward to try to stop him, but was too late. Russell's fists crashed into the other's face, and he looked as if he would kill—as Zana would have killed.

"That's enough," Rollison said, and yanked him off. He crumpled, and would have fallen but for Rollison's support. But he hadn't wasted his time, for the dark-haired man's nose was bleeding, and the man was cringing away.

Russell said flatly: "I don't give a damn whether you believe me or not, Rollison. But find Maude. Understand? They took her away before I could stop them. I thought the police——" He didn't finish, but closed his eyes, as if he was near collapse and despair. "The only thing that matters is finding her before——"

He broke off.

"Before what?" Rollison demanded.

Russell didn't speak. He leaned back in his chair, with his eyes closed, and his face so pale that he looked near death. His hands were limp on the arms of the chair, his legs stretched straight out in front of him.

"Before *what*?" insisted Rollison.

"I don't know," Russell said in a low-pitched voice. "I can only tell you that I'm scared. I thought someone was simply trying to ruin Zana when it began, but a week ago I began to get worried. I couldn't understand it. I tried to get in touch with two of the models who'd been with us a year ago, and left. They'd gone to Paris, according to what I was told, but—they never went to Paris. Or if they did I couldn't find any trace of them. I went there to look, and visited all the places they were likely to go. They just hadn't been there. I've told the police already."

Russell stopped.

The dark-haired man said: "He pretends not to know, but he knows. I tell you he gave me instructions; he ordered Beryl to be killed, who——"

He broke off in the middle of a sentence, then jumped up and leapt towards the door. Tiny Joe had come further inside the room, and Rollison was closer to Russell.

The man wanted just one thing—to get away.

21

EMPTY NIGHT

TINY JOE, on the other side of the room, seemed not to have noticed what the prisoner was doing. But as the man reached his feet, Joe moved as swiftly as Rollison had ever seen a human being move. He reached the doorway ahead of the prisoner, then went for him with both fists. The rain of blows was quite merciless, and the victim cowered back, covering up as best he could, trying to get away from the awful strength in those spindly-looking arms.

Rollison grabbed Tiny Joe.

"Don't stop me, just let me——"

"All right, Joe," said Rollison. "Bill Ebbutt asked me to make sure you didn't damage your hands, but I won't worry whether you damage your hands or his face. Just wait a minute." He shot out a hand and gripped the prisoner by the lapels of his coat, and held him upright. "Now you know what will happen to you if I let him loose," he said. "In or out of the ring, he's a killer. Who do you work for?"

"*Russell!*"

"I don't believe you. Why——"

"If you don't believe me, ask Rose Mary; *she'll* tell you who frightened the life out of her! Or ask Zana; *he'll* tell you that he's been worried about Russell for a long time. It wasn't Russell who made him come to you; he came because Russell had kidnapped Rose Mary. Zana didn't want anything to happen to her. And if you still don't believe me, go and see for yourself. You wanted to know where the Dennison girl is—well, I'll tell you. She's on Russell's yacht. He keeps it at

Richmond; you won't have far to go. He keeps the dogs there, too—you'd better wear some armour."

Russell was on his feet again.

"It's a damned lie, Rollison. Maude isn't there, and the dogs——"

He broke off.

He closed his eyes again, and dropped back into his chair, as if the effort of speaking had been too much for him.

The other man sneered: "Who'd you want to believe—him or me? Why, *I* took the Dennison girl away to-night, and came here to report to him. And he says that I don't work for him! Don't believe me, though, just go and see for yourself."

Rollison said very softly: "Russell, what about it? Still deny that you told this man to kidnap Maude?"

"Yes, of course I do," muttered Russell. "If I didn't feel so muzzy I'd come down with you and help you look. Why the hell should I do anything like this? Why——"

He broke off.

There were footsteps on the stairs, heavy and clear, and a moment later the outer door opened; Rollison heard the chair moving to one side again. There was something very deliberate about the approaching men, and although he dropped his hand to his pocket again, Rollison did not think that there would be any need to use his gun.

He was right.

Grice stepped into the hall, followed by Detective-Sergeant Morgan.

Grice took one glance round at the four people in the room, then looked straight at the dark-haired man and said:

"So you got him, Rolly."

"Got who?"

"Don't pretend that you don't know," said Grice in a bluff voice. "This is Benjamin Allen. I found his photograph in an album at Beryl Ward's flat. Neighbours at Hounslow are quite sure—he's the man who

calls himself Allen. He had the dogs there, and was there this afternoon. All we want to know is who employs him."

"Perhaps you'll listen to reason, Rollison won't," said Benjamin Allen viciously. "There's the Boss. Russell. I've done everything on his orders. And the Dennison girl is at his yacht, all cosy with his man-eating dogs. If you don't believe me, why don't you go and see?"

* * * *

Rollison went down the stairs and into the street. The night air was chilly and there were no stars. A freshening wind blew from the corner, and was welcome against his forehead. Tiny Joe had come down ahead of him, and was standing by Lady Gloria's car. Two uniformed men and one in plain clothes were standing about, too. Grice, who had stayed behind for another word with Russell, came hurrying after Rollison, and when they met he drew Rollison out of earshot of the others.

"Charged Russell?" asked Rollison bleakly.

"I've asked him to go to the Yard for questioning, and he's agreed," said Grice. "That's as far as I want to go at the moment. I've charged Allen, of course. I can tell you one or two other things."

"What?"

"Allen and the man Harrison are really brothers. The man Holden is a cousin."

"All in the family," Rollison said heavily.

"Beryl Ward was married to Allen, but left him two or three months ago," Grice said. "We don't know exactly why, but neighbours say she suddenly became very nervous and edgy. She left Allen and went to this flat where she was eventually murdered. She seldom left the place, just stayed there as if she was frightened of being seen. As far as I can trace, she didn't go back to Heath View until this past week-end. Rose Mary saw her there."

Rollison said: "I wonder what made her go back. Not that it makes much difference now. What about going to Richmond?"

"We're going at once. I'm sending for a search-warrant for the yacht."

"Do you think Allen told the truth?" Rollison asked sharply.

"You mean do I think Allen is fooling us by sending us on a wild-goose chase out to Richmond while Lady Maude's being taken somewhere else?"

"That's what I mean."

"I suppose it's a fifty-fifty chance," conceded Grice. "We can't do any more in a general sense than we are doing, anyhow. But before we head for Richmond—I can call for squad cars on the way, and get some Surrey police on the spot, too—there are two other things for you."

"More trouble?"

"It could be." Grice was speaking flatly, as if of something he hated to admit. "We made a thorough search of the house at Hounslow. There isn't much doubt that Allen knew that Higgs had spotted Rose Mary there, and knew Higgs had telephoned you—that's why Higgs was attacked and why the men ran away from the house. They destroyed most things, but there were some that they didn't destroy and which we've found."

"Let it come."

"We found one or two oddments belonging to the models who've left Zana over the past twelve months, and were supposed to have gone abroad," said Grice bleakly. "The initials in several monograms make it clear. Compacts, cigarette lighters, that kind of thing. No doubt about it. So we had a look round the grounds."

Rollison caught his breath:

"No."

"Yes," said Grice. "You obviously suspected some-

thing like it. We've found three bodies in advanced stages of decomposition, each of a young woman. No doubt about the identity of one of them—she wore a ring. Zana's models didn't go abroad."

The night seemed very cold.

"And Maude Dennison might be murdered, too," Rollison said at last, and his lips seemed stiff. "What have we struck, Bill? Some monster——"

"That's the word," Grice growled. "Now let's go to Richmond. I'll have Russell's yacht surrounded at a safe distance so that no one on board suspects that we're on the way, and no one will be able to get away."

"River watched, too?"

"Yes," said Grice, and got into his car. A driver was already at the wheel. Grice lifted the radio walkie-talkie and gave instructions to the Yard. Rollison heard every word, knew that Grice was leaving nothing undone, and yet—was it possible that they would be in time?

That depended on why Maude had been kidnapped.

That also depended on what had happened to the dead models—whether they had been murdered, and if so, why.

* * * *

They drove through the empty night.

There was not much traffic even near London, and few lights. It was a little after midnight, and this might be a city of sleep, or a city of the dead. Rollison sat at the back of Grice's car, and tried to think clearly. It wasn't easy, because his thoughts were so confused by Rose Mary. She was safe now, but—why?

Some of the models had been kidnapped and were dead.

Why had Rose Mary Bell been left alive?

That question was in his mind all the time, but there was another, deeper, fiercer. Where was Maude? Was she at the yacht?

Was she still alive?

Rollison thought over everything he knew, time and time again. He felt sure that the police would not be able to shake Benjamin Allen's story. If Allen could give evidence to condemn Russell he would; just as Harrison had been eager to give evidence which would have damned him, the Toff.

Rollison wanted to believe Russell.

He liked Russell.

He could not see why a man who would inherit millions, to whom money did not matter at all, should do what Benjamin Allen had accused him of doing.

There was the ugly question: *Why?*

In all that he had seen and heard, Rollison was sure there was a clue which would lead to the answer. At moments it seemed like a word on the tip of his tongue, which he had only to find. At others, all that he had heard, all the contradictory evidence, all the gruesome facts which Grice had told him, seemed to point to nowhere.

Why had anyone lured those models to the Hounslow house and killed and buried them?

Why had Rose Mary been left alive?

Was Maude still alive?

They swept through the silent streets until they reached a road where street lamps shimmered on the dark surface of the Thames. Grice's driver slowed down. The car turned right, towards a narrow road which led to riverside bungalows, each with its little jetty, and to several large houses and to a river yacht club. Rollison did not know where Russell's yacht was moored.

He said abruptly:

"Do you know if Zana's still at his flat?"

"As far as I know. Just before I left I had your message from Lady Gloria and sent a man to Zana's place. Why?"

"I'd like to be sure he's safe in bed."

Grice said: "Wait a minute." The car had slowed down, and a man appeared out of the shadows, coming close and saluting as the car stopped. Grice wound down his window. "Everything quiet here?"

"Yes, sir," the man said, "and we've confirmed that a man went on board to-night with a girl, but don't know whether they're still on board or not." The speaker seemed to sniff. "Not exactly unheard of along here, sir, these days."

"Or any days," Grice said. "Any reports of dogs?"

"Some Alsatians often go aboard one of the yachts, but we haven't been able to find out which one," the Richmond policeman said. "Haven't had long."

"No. Is Russell's yacht surrounded?"

"Yes. One thing's certain, sir: no one can get away from there, even if they swim," the man said confidently. "Superintendent Fison's handled it in person."

"Fine," said Grice. "Thanks." He switched on the walkie-talkie and said: "Hallo, Information Room? Superintendent Grice here. Is there any word from Hugo Zana's apartment? . . . There is? . . . Yes, put him on."

Rollison sat tensely in the gloom. Nearby the dark water rippled, and he could hear its gentle whisper. The lights reflecting on the surface were some way behind. He could just make out the shape of two small boats, close to the bank, one near, one across the river. Soon he was able to make out the shape of men in them: these would be the police, making sure that no one swam past here, or came in a dinghy.

Was Maude here?

Why had Rose Mary been allowed to escape alive?

Grice was listening intently, and then suddenly turned and looked at Rollison.

"Zana's still there," he said abruptly. "The forewoman, Mitzi Zenkel, left him some time ago, looking very agitated. My man has no idea where she went."

"I don't see that it helps," said Rollison. "Mitzi

always gets the rough edge of Zana's tongue, I gather. Anything else?"

"No one's gone aboard Russell's yacht in the past three-quarters of an hour, sir," the Richmond man declared. "You can take that for gospel."

"No reason to assume anyone will come here," Grice said. "And anyone going aboard will be challenged as well as anyone coming away. I——"

He broke off.

The policeman jumped at a new and unexpected sound just along the river bank. Rollison felt himself go tense, and the sound came again.

It was a dog, barking on a loud, fierce note.

"That's from Russell's yacht," the Richmond man breathed. "It's moored by itself; that can't be coming from anywhere else."

22

QUIET

THE dog barked again.

There was nothing ferocious in the sound, but the deep roar told the waiting men how big a beast it was. Rollison got out of the car and went to the edge of the parapet. He could just make out the white shape of the yacht which was moored by itself a little way down the river. There were no lights on board, but the barking came from there.

Suddenly the barking stopped.

They waited, tensely, expecting more; but it did not come.

Rollison said: "Someone went aboard, and the dogs welcomed him."

"It's impossible!" the poilceman exclaimed. "I just don't believe——"

He broke off. Another man came up on a bicycle, tyres whirring on the gravel, the only noise in the quiet. This man dismounted close to the car, and came up smartly.

"Mr. Grice, sir?"

"Yes." Grice was also standing by the side of the car.

"Message from Superintendent Fison, sir. A person has just climbed aboard the *Flinden III.* Both approaches have been covered, sir, as well as the jetty, and no one was seen to approach, but this person climbed on board. It was just possible to see him, sir. That's what disturbed the dogs."

The other Richmond man was saying under his breath: "It's impossible."

It had happened.

Grice wasn't the man to lose his temper, but he was hard-voiced as he said:

"I'd like to know how he managed to slip through. Where is Superintendent Fison?"

"At a small boat opposite the *Flinden III.* He asked me whether you would care to join him, or whether he should come and see you, sir."

"I'll come along——" Grice began.

Rollison said sharply: "Don't!" He was standing very straight and staring across the water at the yacht. "Don't!" he repeated. "Bill, get everyone off the water. Tell Fison to get out of that boat, too. Send everyone well away from Russell's yacht, the farther away the better. Warn other people in yachts or house-boats nearby."

"What the hell's got into you?" demanded Grice. "If we do that——"

"Do it," Rollison urged. "You know what's been done already; you know how they nearly turned me into little pieces. If I'd been blown up, dozens of others might have been. If they've nitro-glycerine to spare for a job like that, they'll have it for this."

"There's no reason at all to believe——" began Grice.

"No reason," Rollison barked. "Just logic. Bill, we were sent here. You didn't like it and I didn't like it, but that's what happened. We came here because Allen deliberately told us to come. He'd know that we would take every precaution, and yet he told us about the yacht. Now, someone's gone aboard. There was only one way: to swim under water for a hundred yards out of sight of your men. That's what happened. There isn't any other way."

"You may be right," Grice conceded tautly.

"One thing's certain," Rollison said. "They meant to kill me. From the time I started on this job they decided that. I'm here. Allen knew I'd come, and whoever employs him knew I would come, so we can be pretty sure that I was the victim. For God's sake get everyone away."

"You must have taken leave of your senses," Grice exclaimed. "If Lady Maude is on board the yacht——"

"I'm going to find out," Rollison said. "Bill, there isn't much time. Curse me afterwards if I'm wrong, but get everyone away." He moved towards the river, taking off his coat.

Grice moved.

"If you're right, you can't save her," he said, and gripped Rollison's arm.

* * * *

The listening men stared at him in the dim light, most of which was reflected from the dark surface of the Thames. Now there was hardly a sound except the lapping water; it was so quiet here.

"Bill, this is my job," Rollison insisted. "Get your chaps away, and let me go."

"I'll get the men away," Grice said, "but you're not throwing your life away." He moved, Rollison felt something cold on his wrist, and heard a sharp click.

Grice had handcuffed himself to Rollison, who could not get away.

* * * *

The police were withdrawn quickly, and in five minutes the small boats were some distance away from the *Flinden III*, and Fison and two other men were out of their boat. Two families had been evacuated from houseboats. Grice, Rollison and two Yard men, still within sight of Russell's yacht, were standing by. The handcuffs still held Rollison to Grice. The seconds ticked by. A long way off a clock boomed one. It was like a death-knell, and far away though it was, the booming note reverberated.

"If they've slipped away——" Grice began.

Then the explosion came.

It filled the night with awful suddenness, although Rollison had been expecting it for so long. It set his teeth on edge. It turned the night into day in one great white flash, and in this light they could see the water, churning to wild fury, the trees, the shapes of boats and yachts, the bungalows, the wooden jetties. It showed up the bungalows on the other side of the river, and in front of their eyes one of them suddenly broke into pieces, as huge debris from the yacht struck it. Now debris was crashing into the water, great spouts were sent up, the lapping at the sides became a surging, tumultuous wave which smashed above the banks, swept almost waist high at Rollison and Grice, and shifted the car several feet. Men cried out in this mighty deluge, while the light had vanished; the darkness seemed greater now. The river seethed and hissed, even when the last of the debris had fallen. Then, suddenly, there was light; light in the yacht, deep red and angry, where the fire had taken a hold down below, and fire in some of the bungalows.

Grice said: "You'll live to thank me, Rolly," and unlocked the handcuffs.

Rollison didn't speak.

Now the police were at the walkie-talkie radios, flashing messages for help. Within minutes the fire-fighting services were on their way, more police were being rushed here.

The people who had been evacuated were staring from th' places to which they had been taken from the wreckage of their homes. A woman was crying, two men were cursing, children were gaping as if awed by the scene and yet, at the same time, excited.

Drenched from the chest downwards, Rollison watched the blazing fires and heard Grice giving instructions to the Information Room. Grice finished at last, and turned and said:

"You all right?"

"Yes, thanks." But Rollison was too full of dread to mean that. "How quickly can you get me back to the West End?"

"As fast as a car can take you. Why?"

"I want to talk to Russell," Rollison said in a choky voice. "If he knows anything, he'll talk. Zana's place still being watched?"

"Do you think Zana had any idea what was to happen?"

"Bill, just get me to the Yard with authority to question Russell," begged Rollison. "There must be a chance for Maude. I don't believe this devil Smith would kill her here." He bit his lips. "God knows whether I'm right or not. He certainly sacrificed some of his dogs. He'd know you'd be searching for Alsatians. If I can't get anything out of Russell or Zana, I'll try Mitzi. Can you have her watched, too? No one's been closer to Zana, no one is likely to know more about him. I discovered that to-night. Can you fix it?"

"Yes." Grice was opening the door of the car, and the sergeant was already revving the engine.

"Fine," said Rollison. "Thanks."

"Move over," Grice said. "I'm coming, too."

* * * *

Russell was at the Yard, in one of the waiting-rooms used for suspects. He looked pasty white, his eyes were glittering, there was a beading of perspiration on his forehead. He was smoking a cigarette furiously when Rollison and Grice entered the room, and he swung round on them.

"Have you found her?"

"No," Rollison said. "We——"

"Then she wasn't at the yacht! She——"

"We don't know whether she was nor not. The yacht was blown to little pieces," Rollison said deliberately.

Russell seemed to draw back as if beneath a physical blow.

"We don't know whether Lady Maude was on it, or whether she was taken anywhere else," Rollison told him. "And you——"

"Why the devil do you keep questioning me? I don't know anything about it—good God, do you think I would blow my own yacht up? You must be crazy."

"Stop screeching, and listen to me," Rollison said savagely. "How true is it that Zana and Rose Mary Bell were in love?"

"She's fond of him or his money, and he's crazy about her," said Russell.

"Sure?"

"Positive."

"How long have you worked with Zana?"

"About two years."

"How long has Mitzi worked for him?"

"Oh, for ever! They knew each other before the war, and since he started in London she's been his right hand."

"Just that?"

"I don't understand you," Russell said.

"Did they ever live together?"

"If they did, it would be none of my business."

"It might be very much Maude's business," Rollison said softly. "Did they live together?"

"Well——"

"Did they?"

"Yes, when I first met them," Russell admitted. "At least, Zana spent as much time in Mitzi's apartment above the *salon* as he did in his own."

"Doesn't he now?"

"No, he—well, no."

"Russell, listen," Rollison said. "We must have a motive for hatred against Zana. Do I have to tell you about how a woman scorned can hate?"

Russell blanched.

"Oh, my God!" he said.

Rollison swung round on Grice.

"We want Mitzi Zenkel, and we want her in a hurry. Come on." He started for the door, and Grice followed, while Russell stood staring with glittering eyes. The door closed on him.

"Bill," said Rollison as they half ran towards the lift, "we need someone who can swim like a duck. Zana can; so can this Mitzi. I read passages from Zana's book of memories at Russell's place. Mitzi was an expert swimmer; they escaped from a concentration camp together, swam wide rivers in the depth of winter, suffered every conceivable hardship together. Then they lived together—ugly little Zana and clever faithful little hunch-backed Mitzi. Then Zana fell in love with someone else, or at least left Mitzi high and dry. That could cause hate."

They went downstairs in the lift, and hurried out.

"You think the woman went to Richmond, swam under water to the yacht, and——"

"Put the nitro-glycerine on board, and started a fire or set a fuse, so that she had time to swim to safety

before the yacht went up. Yes, if she's behind all this, we know what she hoped would happen, and can be pretty sure that she'd get back to her flat as soon as she could. But we know that she'd realise that she still might not be rid of me—that's the one reason I have to hope that Maude isn't on board. While I'm alive she'd need some hold on me——"

"I'm not saying that you might not be right about Mitzi Zenkel," Grice said. "She might be Mr. Smith. But why is it so vital to kill or to be able to exert pressure on you?"

"I don't know any more than you do," Rollison said; "but listen, Bill. There's a chance that Maude is still a prisoner and alive. If she is, then Mitzi's flat above the *salon* is as likely a place as any to find her. If the police turn up, Mitzi will probably blow herself and the others to pieces, but if I go alone I might be able to handle her."

"You'll much more likely be blown up with the rest," Grice said abruptly. "I've had to restrain you once to-night."

"Bill, if it's a police raid, there won't be a chance," insisted Rollison desperately. "If I go alone there might be."

23

CHANCE

GRICE was a long time answering.

Their footsteps rang out on the hard, cold floor. They walked past closed doors into the big hall, where the duty sergeant and a constable stood waiting as if they had all the time in the world. Outside, cars were starting up—perhaps on this job, perhaps to go out to

the scenes of other crimes. This was only one of many, although to Rollison it was the one thing that existed.

Grice could keep him away from Mitzi and his almost despairing hope.

They reached the top of the steps. A car, swinging round, sent its bright headlights upon them, and as Rollison stared at Grice he saw the Yard man's set lips, the bleakness of his expression. There was nothing more that Rollison could say. Grice could see all the issues clearly, and after what had happened must know that there was a real risk that Mitzi—if she was behind all this—would cause great destruction and more loss of life before she was captured.

She wouldn't let herself be captured alive if she could avoid it.

Grice must be facing those facts and hating them, and coming to the conclusion that Rollison ought to have his chance. If he didn't decide that, he was crazy. He——

"How long do you want?" Grice demanded.

"It shouldn't take long," Rollison said, and felt an enormous sense of relief. "Give me three-quarters of an hour. I ought to have Russell's keys; one might fit, and I can get into the building, anyway. Then if I'm not out on time, you'll have to have a cut yourself. But don't forget the kind of madness that lies behind all this."

"I won't forget anything," Grice said. "I hope to God that I'm not making you throw your life away."

* * * *

Then a report came from the police watching the *salon*. Yes—Mitzi Zenkel had returned only half an hour ago; with Zana, who had left his own flat ten minutes before.

* * * *

Rollison drew up near the *salon*, half an hour afterwards. The watching policemen had been withdrawn. The street lights in the square were out, except one at

each corner, and here and there a lighted window broke the darkness. There was a soft spittle of rain in the air which he felt as he looked upwards. There was a lighted window at the top of the building.

He made no attempt to hide, and the light of one of the lamps fell on him as he drew near the front entrance.

He found that the picture of Rose Mary had faded, even her beauty had lost its spell. There was the different English loveliness of Maude, and there was a new factor, too: the way Grice had spoken, the indications that Grice hated the possibility that death was very close. If there was a chance, Rollison knew that it would be of his own making.

A light went out across the square. Now only the light of the *salon* apartment was on. Mitzi's.

Rollison passed the front door and went to the telephone kiosk just round the corner. Further along was a police car, with three men in it. Similar cars with their silent passengers were at all the approaches to the square. Rollison went in, and the light of the kiosk came on as he trod on the floor. He put in his pennies, and then dialled Mitzi's number. The *brrr-brr-brrr-brrr* seemed to go on and on, as if they were determined not to answer it.

He got his money back, gave them a minute's respite, and then tried again.

Brrr-brrr. Brrr-brrr. Brrr-ck.

A woman said in a sleepy voice: "What is it, please?"

He believed that was Mitzi, with her slightly broken English, but couldn't be quite sure. For a moment he felt a great dread: that he was wrong, that she was up there by herself, and he had woken her. Yet Zana was here. Maude?

He said: "I want to speak to Hugo Zana."

"Mr. *Zana*? That is impossible; he is not here."

"I know he's there," said Rollison. "Tell him that Richard Rollison wants to speak to him about Rose Mary Bell."

"About *what*?"

Rollison said very carefully: "About Rose Mary Bell. I'm coming right up."

"No, he is not here, he——"

"I'm coming to see for myself," Rollison said.

He rang off and stepped out of the kiosk. Its light went out and the darkness was like a cloak. He walked briskly to the corner and glanced up at the light at the top of the *salon* building. If Mitzi was there alone, and if she was asleep, why was the light on? The police *knew* Zana had come here.

He tried Russell's keys in the lock. The door might be bolted, and probably would be, but——

A key turned and the door opened when he pushed it.

Rollison's heart began to thump. He stepped inside cautiously, but nothing happened. He left the door on a latch, and peered about the darkness, gradually able to pick out the pale walls and the pale carpet on floor and stairs. He used his pencil torch and put on a light; it was glowing and soft. He glanced at the back of the door and saw the bolts which could so easily have been put into position. Why hadn't they been?

He started up the stairs.

At each landing he put on more light. Now there was a trail of lights behind him, and he went up the stairs, on which beautiful women had walked, wearing their lovely gowns—and some of them had walked to a grave in Hounslow, and others had walked out of the world of fashion.

He reached the top landing.

Here the door was solid and dark blue. On it was a brass plate, reading:

MDE. MITZI ZENKEL.
PRIVATE.

He could try to force the door, but it would be a waste of time. He pressed the bell-push and heard the ringing

at the other side. His heart was still thumping heavily, painfully. He could not be sure that he was right if Maude wasn't here——

He rang again.

If Mitzi didn't open the door, that would suggest that she was afraid to.

He had to get inside, he had to try to disarm Zana, he——

He heard a sound, then the door open a crack. Swift as he could move, he thrust his foot against it so that it could not be closed.

"Is that Mr. Rollison?" That was Mitzi.

"Yes. And I know Zana is in there. I——"

"You may come in," Mitzi said.

"No!" cried Zana. "Rollison, go away, go away!"

But Mitzi, little mouselike, pallid Mitzi, covered Rollison with an automatic.

* * * *

Rollison's heart steadied with this proof that he had been right. Now he had to prepare for the final effort; to disarm Mitzi, to make her give way without causing more damage and more death.

The door opened wider and Mitzi backed away.

"Keep your hands in the air and come in," she ordered. "If you do not, I will shoot you."

She was safely out of arm's reach.

Rollison went right inside. Mitzi, fully dressed but with her grey hair in curlers, closed the door quickly. There was the light in the room opposite the front door, and there were other doors, leading right and left. Two were ajar, and each room was in darkness.

"Rollison, you are coming to your death!" Zana cried from the room where the light was on.

"Go into that room," Mitzi ordered. "Keep your hands in the air. Higher!"

Rollison raised his hands a few inches.

He had to push the door wider open with his foot; it

swung slowly. He stepped into a charming room of duck-egg blue and gentle grey and gilt, but it wasn't the room or the *décor* which struck at him. It was the sight of Maude sitting in a chair and facing him, bound and helpless. Tied to a door was Zana. There was a rope round his neck, drawn tight to a hook behind the door, and his hands were tied in front of him.

"She will kill you, she will kill us all!" he said hoarsely. "Where are the police?"

Rollison didn't answer, but looked at Mitzi, so small and hunched—and deadly.

"She has committed all these crimes. She is mad; she must be mad!" Zana gasped. "To hate me so, to kill——"

"You can talk as much as you like," Mitzi said in that hard voice, "it will not help you or anyone."

"Mitzi," Zana said chokingly, "Mitzi, all the things I have done for you, and you repay me like this." His eyes glistened, as if with tears. "Rollison, I did not know until to-night. She telephoned me, I was to come here, and when I came she attacked me. I was not ready, I had no chance. And she is mad—mad!"

"But sane enough to make a fool of you," Mitzi sneered, "and sane enough to know this is the end for all of us."

"Mitzi——"

"It is the end," Mitzi said. "Now that Rollison is here, it is complete. Talk if you must."

"*Mitzi*," Zana whimpered. "All our days together."

The woman's eyes glittered as if with rage, but she took no notice of Zana, just motioned to Rollison.

"Turn round," she said, "and do not move abruptly. There is some nitro-glycerine very delicately poised. Vibration will make it fall." She tapped Rollison's pockets and felt under his arms and his waist swiftly and efficiently; it was easy to imagine her hardy and capable as any man. She took out the gun he had taken from Allen—then drew back.

She hadn't found the knives.

Rollison turned round and made himself say: "Why pick on me, Mitzi? And why pick on Maude?"

Mitzi gave a queer little laugh. "So you hope to buy Maude's safety by promising to keep silent? Is that so?"

She believed that Rollison was unarmed, was as helpless as the others.

Maude sat there, her eyes trying to talk, quite helpless.

"I came because I hoped to save Maude," Rollison said.

Was there a cylinder of the explosive perched precariously near by? That mattered most of all. The reason for Mitzi's determination to kill him hardly counted; only time mattered, and the measure of their danger.

Then Rollison saw a little table with a small metal cylinder on it, like the one which had been tied to the self-starter arm of his car.

Mitzi gave a taut little smile.

"You have seen it," she said.

"I've seen it," Rollison said. "So you can blow us all to smithereens. I can also see that it's useless to reason with you, but—why pick on me?"

Cautiously, fearlessly, he flexed the muscles of his arm to bring that knife down to his hand.

Mitzi didn't speak.

"I know the reason," Zana said despairingly. "Since I came here she has told me every single thing. How she hates me, how——" He broke off, and looked with desperate pleading into the woman's eyes. "How can you do this to me, Mitzi, how——"

"How can I do it? How can I do *this*?" She stepped swiftly towards him and struck him across the face time and time again; and Rollison seized the moment to draw the knife much farther down.

Mitzi swung round on him.

If she had seen that movement of his arm she might——

"I can tell you," she screeched at him. "We are prisoners together, we starve together, I save him from the guards, I escape with him. Always we shall be together, he says, and we travel great mountains and cross wide rivers, and for his food I sell my body. Even that I do for him! And together we come here, and work together, and I—I who have the genius, what do I say? I say to him: 'Hugo, no woman can succeed in this business; it must be a man.' So I design the dresses, I create them, he only pretends. *I* created the dresses, so *I created him*!"

Her voice cracked.

There was Zana, helpless, afraid: and yet, beyond doubt, ashamed.

And Mitzi was almost choking with her rage.

"So we are partners. He is the great Hugo Zana. I am his slave, his woman. I do not complain, for it is what I want. But he—he turns from me. He is tired of my leathery face and my humped back, and what does he do? *What does he do?*"

She paused.

She screamed: "He goes with these girls *I* dress. He gives them money *I* make for him, and so I hate, I hate, I hate him!"

* * * *

It was said, and was easy to understand; even possible to feel a great compassion.

And the handle of the knife was very close to Rollison's hand.

* * * *

Mitzi was quieter now, as if her passion was spent. Zana stood there, pale of face, and with his eyes glittering. Maude seemed to be fascinated by the other woman, and stared only at her.

"Now it is the end," Mitzi said. "Some I have killed

and some I have made ugly, and some I have frightened. Now those who served me are caught, and it is over Is that not true, Rollison?"

"Yes, they're prisoners," Rollison answered, and stopped moving his fingers, for she seemed to watch him so intently. "Why did they serve you, Mitzi? What made them so loyal?"

"Because she pays them much money," Zana said wearily. "This Allen, these other men, she pays them with her share of the business. Always I give her one-half of the profits, and this is how she spends it."

"In the beginning they had only to frighten the models away from Zana," Mitzi said. "But one girl did not wish to go, and she was killed—and afterwards there was no end." She spoke almost sadly. "And you, Rollison? Beryl Allen told you the truth, isn't it? That I was Mr. Smith, and so——" She broke off, staring. "In the morning she came to tell you! It is so!"

"Tell me?" said Rollison softly.

"Yes, of course!" Mitzi's voice screeched upwards. "That is so!"

"No," said Rollison, "it is not."

The knife was almost in his hand. He had to grip it firmly, had to remember how easy it would be to knock over the nitro-glycerine. Yet he found himself listening to the woman, seeing the horror in her eyes, and beginning to understand.

"But Beryl told you! Afterwards she came back to see you, but Allen stopped her. You *knew*!"

"If I had known I would have gone to the police," Rollison said.

"But she told Allen that she had told you!"

Then Zana gave a high-pitched cackle of laughter, pointed his bound hands at Mitzi, bared his big and ugly teeth, and cried:

"He didn't know. You need not have tried to kill him. *He did not know!*"

There was an awful moment of silence. In it the knife slid firmly into Rollison's grasp, and he flung it. Mitzi raised her hand in a flare of alarm, but the knife cut across her fingers, and she dropped the gun.

"Rollison!" screamed Zana. "Stop her! Stop her!"

Rollison was still two yards away from her when Mitzi swung round towards the cylinder—and death.

24

LIFE STORY

MITZI was nearer the table and the tube than Rollison, and neither Zana nor Maude could move. Mitzi's hands were outstretched to jolt the table and send the cylinder tumbling.

Maude sat staring at disaster, her eyes huge. Zana's eyes were closed.

Rollison was behind Mitzi. If he jumped and brought her down, the thud might be enough to tumble the cylinder; even if it did not, she might be able to stretch out and shake the table violently.

Blood streamed from her cut fingers.

Rollison launched himself forward, hands outstretched, grabbed Mitzi by the waist and lifted her high. Her kicking feet passed within inches of the table, and she screamed and writhed. He held her tight, but was off balance, and if he fell then both of them would crash.

Rollison felt himself staggering towards the table, fought desperately, swerving as he might on the football field. He carried Mitzi safely past, and they crashed into the wall.

There was awful silence.

Silence.

There was wonderful silence!

Rollison lowered Mitzi. He saw Zana standing limp and pale, and Maude slumped down, chin on her chest, unconscious.

Mitzi still struggled and shouted and screamed, until Rollison struck her sharply at the nape of the neck, and she lost consciousness, too.

Rollison felt sweat trickling down his forehead, had never felt more weak. Slowly he went to Zana's side and cut him free, then went to Maude and freed her, too. He massaged her wrists a little, but she was still unconscious.

She'd be all right soon.

"Zana," Rollison said huskily, "go and open the door, please. Go downstairs. The police are outside."

Zana said in a croaking voice: "I salute a very brave man." He moved slowly, and disappeared.

* * * *

Five minutes later the police arrived.

* * * *

"We're not going to have much trouble getting a conviction here," Grice said ten minutes after Mitzi had been taken away. He looked at Zana, who seemed to have aged twenty years in the last few hours. "Did you suspect her, Mr. Zana?"

"No," Zana said. "Never did I suspect Mitzi. Never did I realise how deep was her love, and how bitterly it turned to hate. To-night she telephoned so urgently, so I hurried to see her. I came into the room and she dropped a rope over my head. Mitzi is very, very strong, and I was taken by surprise." He closed his eyes as he went on, and it was almost impossible to hear his words. "I did not know what I was doing to her. These young girls, so lovely, were irresistible to me.

Please understand I did not realise that Mitzi knew of them, or that if she knew that she would care."

He stopped again, then asked as if with great effort:

"Did she—make Rose Mary—suffer very much?"

"Zana," Rollison said gently, "Rose Mary is alive."

He saw first disbelief, then radiance, dawn slowly in the little man's eyes.

* * * *

"There's more to Rose Mary than you might think," Grice said a little later. "She's seen Zana, and it's already taken years off his age. She's told us more, too. Mitzi meant to torment Zana to the end of his days."

Rollison said mildly: "She did quite a job."

"She did a wickedly good job," Grice agreed soberly, "and she had some damned efficient helpers until Beryl Ward fooled them all into thinking that she'd told you. That forced the pace too much. They nearly had the luck, too—even to having Harrison at Beryl Ward's flat when you were there, and——"

"Bill, I've never been to Beryl Ward's flat," remonstrated Rollison gently. "Remember?"

"I'd forgotten," Grice said dryly. "At least you'll admit this: the essential thing was to kill you, because you were believed to know that Mitzi Zenkel was behind it all. Allen watched Russell's flat last night expecting you to go there. If he could not kill you, he was to try to lure you to the yacht. The attempt to frame Russell had been in Mitzi's mind for some time—that's why the dogs had been sent to the yacht. If they were traced it would point to him. She herself swam under water and put the nitro-glycerine aboard, believing you'd be there. Hoping the yacht was being watched, she had sent Allen and a girl, one of the seamstresses, to the yacht. You'd learn that a man and girl had gone aboard and would jump to the conclusion that the girl was Lady Maude."

"That all adds up," Rollison mused. "I can't under-

stand why they assumed that if I knew who was behind it, I wouldn't tell you."

"The Toff is renowned for playing lone wolf!"

"Hmm. Any idea why Rose Mary wasn't killed?" Rollison asked.

"When Higgs traced them they went into a panic. They were afraid of the consequences if we arrived and found her dead. They didn't think that Rose Mary knew everything, and believed she would be afraid to talk, anyhow, knowing what had happened to some of the other models. Panic drove them to set the dog on you, too. They thought their number was up. Then they had breathing space, and tried again."

"They certainly tried," Rollison said. "I saw Higgs this morning, by the way. He's going to have some nasty scars, but his eyes are all right, and when the plastic surgeons have finished with him, he'll be almost himself again."

"That's fine," said Grice, with real feeling. "These chaps of Ebbutt's can do a wonderful job; this may persuade the A.C. that we ought to invite you to work with us more than we do! Not that you'd agree, you still prefer lone wolfing!" Grice grinned, but obviously wasn't concentrating on what he was saying.

"You're quite as bad as Mitzi," Rollison said. "Bill, I think I'll go over and see Ebbutt, and tell his boys that even the police have a kindly word for them sometimes."

Grice grinned again.

Rollison went out.

He had more than a friendly word from Grice for Ebbutt's men; he had a gift from Charles Russell for all who had worked on the case. Two hundred and fifty pounds a man, with a bonus of a thousand for Tiny Joe Laws, and two thousand pounds for Higgs.

After carrying those tidings, Rollison went leisurely and contentedly to see Lady Gloria and Maude.

Maude was still suffering from shock, but she wouldn't suffer for long; Russell had haunted the *Marigold Club* for news of her, and there was little doubt that Lady Gloria would agree that Maude could do much worse than marry one of the Flinden Russells.

Next, there was Zana.

He was very quiet when Rollison saw him, but when Rollison asked what he proposed to do, he said:

"It was true, Mitzi designed the dresses. I did not. But in future I will, my friend, and Rose Mary will model them. I must prove to the world that I can."

Rollison believed that he would.

Finally, there was Jolly.

Jolly was at the Gresham Street flat, in the kitchen, his hands floury, a faint smell of garlic in the air, the oven warm, everything ready for the evening meal, for it was then a little after six o'clock. Rollison put his head round the door, sniffed, and said:

"Who's the feast for, Jolly?"

"It is by way of a thanksgiving that you are still alive," said Jolly soberly.

Rollison grinned.

"Let's give thanks in a different cause! I walked for half an hour this afternoon and looked upon some of the most seductive figures in London, and my heart didn't give a single flutter. Think Zana cured me, Jolly?"

"I hope not, sir," Jolly said, and opened the oven door. "Incidentally, what new trophy do you suggest for the wall?"

"A gown by Zana, possibly," said Rollison, and then chuckled. "But I'd settle for a hair of the dog that didn't bite me, if Grice will play."

"I think he will, sir," Jolly said.

THE END

Chasing beautiful girls was a lifelong practice for the Toff, but this time he could call it a duty

For a year Hugo Zana, the famous couturier, had had his models frightened away from working for him without any conceivable explanation.

Rose Mary Bell, the best, the most beautiful and the most loyal of them all had refused to be scared away until one day she simply disappeared. In despair, Zana turned to the Toff for help ; and the pursuit of the world's most beautiful woman led the debonair Richard Rollison into unimaginably deep water.

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